EXAMINING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores difficult conversations in environmental conflicts. Environmental conflicts emerge over complex environmental issues, and the resulting decision-making processes are fraught with difficult conversations among diverse individual and organizational actors. Such difficult conversations among diverse actors play out in public decision-making forums and can amass considerable public attention. However, many of the difficult conversations that move these issues forward occur among organizational representatives, and they take place across a range of public and private settings. Unfortunately, we know very little about the dynamics of these interorganizational conversations, particularly those in private or semi-private settings.

This dissertation seeks to contribute insight into representatives' interactions in difficult conversations through three separate studies that explored (1) the interactional challenges representatives encounter in inter-organizational conversations and the issues they pose, (2) the role of emotion in their conversations, and (3) the situated challenges encountered as well as management strategies used by researchers in studying interorganizational conversations. To investigate these research questions, a case was used regarding an ongoing controversy regarding Navy training activities and their potential impact on marine mammals.

An engaged scholarship approach is used in this dissertation, which places emphasis on collaboratively designed research among researchers and participants. It calls attention to the joint creation of relationships and encourages reflexive self-

awareness of one's research practice. I engaged in twenty-nine qualitative interviews with representatives involved in the Navy-marine mammal issue. In the third study, I supplemented interview data with reflection journal data and email correspondence from participants. The analyses of the three studies offer a multi-faceted view of difficult conversations from both representative and researcher perspectives.

The first study's findings suggested that representatives perceived conversational challenges stemming from scientific interpretation debates in light of larger contextual factors such as organizational, legal, and political interests. Representatives might manage these challenges through personalized relationships and a shift to more systemic thinking regarding their relationships. The second study suggests that professionalism was a key concept regarding how emotions were managed in the emotional moments of representatives' conversations, that a negative characterization of these moments leads representatives to neutralize emotion display, and that individuals' need to protect their professional identities lead them to engage in particular management strategies. In the third study, conversational challenges regarding relational connection and research access emerged, which needed to be managed with situated practices sensitive to larger legal and political contexts, through the use of situated judgment.

Taken together, these studies suggest that key factors in difficult conversations relate to (1) contextual influence, (2) systemic connection, and (3) relational climate. These factors combine into a proposed model of difficult conversations, which distinguishes between stuck conversations, which keep actors locked in old ways of relating to each other, and more constructive expansive conversations.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a kid growing up in a Rhode Island beach town with thriving commercial fishing industries and many marine recreational opportunities, I observed a great deal of conflict pertaining to the environment. People clashed over who had beach access, how far land rights extended from waterfront properties, what recreational activities were allowed where, and how much lobster or fish could be caught, when, and by whom. I observed how people clashed over which wildlife habitats should be off limits to human use and which should be open to regulated use by commercial fishing and shipping industries. Such complex issues are examples of environmental conflicts, in that they involve diverse individual and organizational actors with conflicting perspectives on how to manage environmental resources (Cox, 2013; Emerson, Nabatchi, O'Leary, & Stephens, 2003). Actors interacting in the decision-making processes pertaining to these complex issues engage in difficult conversations as they grapple with their differences.

This dissertation seeks to extend our theoretical and practical understanding of the difficult conversations that emerge in environmental conflicts. The focus for this study is on interorganizational settings given that in environmental conflicts, diverse organizations communicate in contentious conversations regarding complex issues (Blackburn & Bruce, 1995; Sidaway, 2005). Through an engaged scholarship approach, this dissertation considers difficult conversations from the multiple perspectives of both organizational representatives directly involved in difficult conversations, and

researchers, who become involved for research purposes. As difficulty and conflict are largely a matter of perception (Fisher & Ury, 2011), this multi-perspectival approach is intended to draw a rich picture of the concept of difficult conversations and generate insight for future theorizing and practice. The following research questions inform the three studies that comprise this dissertation:

RQ1: What are the interactional challenges representatives encounter in inter-organizational conversations and the issues they pose and what strategies do representatives use to manage them?

RQ2: What is the role of emotion in representatives' interorganizational conversations and what emotion management strategies do they employ?

RQ3: What are the situated challenges associated with engaged researcher-participant relationships and conversations and what strategies do researchers use to manage them?

These three research questions were investigated using qualitative interviews with organizational representatives from a variety of stakeholders involved with the Navy-marine mammal issue. The third research question was explored using additional data in the form of field journal notes and email correspondence with participants. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Tracy, 2013) to generate insight regarding difficult conversations. The first study (RQ1) suggested importance of adopting a learning framework when managing interactional challenges and positively transforming difficult conversations. The second study (RQ2) highlighted that emotion is viewed negatively in difficult conversations and is typically managed through strategies that

neutralize emotion and align with standards of professionalism. Lastly, the third study (RQ3) identified a set of situated challenges in difficult conversations and emphasized the importance of exercising situated judgment when employing a variety of management strategies.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by providing an overview to the research site, the Navy-marine mammal issue, and how I became interested in this case. I then present the relevant literature that is foregrounded in each of the three studies: (1) difficult interorganizational conversations in environment conflict, (2) emotion and environment conflict, and (3) engaged scholarship and the management of difficult conversation in environmental conflict. In each section, I present the relevant research literature that informs that specific study and conclude by specifying the focus and rationale for the study. Then, I present the methodology used to conduct the studies. I conclude by forecasting the organization of the dissertation.

The Navy-Marine Mammal Issue

Conflicting perspectives on the balance between national security needs and environmental protection have created tension across the governmental, environmental, regulatory and scientific communities. Controversy largely stems from different perspectives regarding how the United States Navy (Navy) conducts military training exercises in light of unclear impacts on marine mammals living in underwater training sites. The Navy is involved because of its interest in conducting training exercises in order to maintain military readiness. The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) perspective emphasizes regulation of federal agency actions under applicable federal

law, when those actions have the potential to cause environmental impacts. The environmental community is comprised of numerous organizations with environmental conservation interests, who coalesce around an emphasis on marine mammal protection, although they vary in their stance and concerns for Navy training activities. The scientist community includes bioacoustics and marine mammal scientists from various research and academic institutions with varying perspectives on the threat or harm of Navy training activities posed to marine mammals. In their advisory role, the Marine Mammal Commission is an independent government agency that has been described as a watchdog agency for marine mammal conservation. The California Coastal Commission, given its oversight of the state's coastal waters in which Navy training activities have been conducted, has emphasized marine mammal protection and legal jurisdiction concerns.

These organizations have diverse needs, missions and interests in regards to Navy training activities, which serve to complicate greatly the Navy-marine mammal issue. Their diverse perspectives have tended towards conflict over the last twenty years (Zirbel, Balint, & Parsons, 2011). The Navy-marine mammal conflict escalated to legal conflict in 1997 in a tumultuous history that includes a 2008 Supreme Court decision found in favor of the Navy. The legal battles in this conflict have continued recently (Center for Biological Diversity, 2015).

Public statements issued by the Navy and environmentalists suggest a contentious relationship among organizations in this conflict. For example, environmental groups have pointed to the "Navy's official indifference" towards

environmental protection (Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, 2004) and their poor "decision to shoot first and study the environmental impacts [later]" (Environmental News Service, 2010). They have expressed disappointment in NMFS for permitting Navy training exercises with exclusions from federal environmental protection laws (Smith, 2014). The Navy has complained that public perception of sonar testing has been tainted by inaccurate information from environmental groups with "aggressive environmental agendas" (Rice, 2009) and has described their demands for precaution during training exercises as "arbitrary and excessive" and risking U.S. national security interests (Environmental News Service, 2008). There does not appear to be public comment from NMFS regarding their perceptions of the relationships in this conflict. This may be attributed to what seems as NMFS' relatively minor role in environmental groups' negative characterizations in this inter-organizational conflict (Horwitz, 2014).

The Navy-marine mammal issue has captured my interest since my undergraduate days and I have been long eager to contribute in some way to its management. In 2010, I conducted a mixed methods pilot study aimed at capturing the perceptions from both Navy and environmental community organization members of the quality of relationships among them (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010). Data was collected through a quantitative survey that included qualitative open-ended questions. Through this study, participants highlighted issues of concern with the present lack of meaningful relationships between them and expressed optimism that both parties could work together on issues of mutual concern and benefit. They also expressed frustration and

fear in regards to communicating across the aisle with other organizations they did not trust while also acknowledging they needed to better understand each other's perspective. The results from this study suggested that the parties might benefit from communicative spaces that could accommodate differences not only in interests but also in communication styles.

The Navy-marine mammal issue is an excellent example of a protracted inter-organizational conflict, having developed a tumultuous history among the various conflict parties over the past roughly twenty years. While substantive issues in this conflict receive the most airtime and exposure in the public's eye, my pilot study (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010) supports Walker's (1997) claim that relationship issues underlie conflicts. The focus of that study precluded me from exploring the perceptions of individuals affiliated with other key involved organizations or from delving deeper into individuals' experiences interacting on the issue. This dissertation focuses on these interorganizational conversations regarding the Navy-marine mammal issue by extending the pilot study into the realm of difficult conversations within environmental conflict.

Environmental Conflict and Difficult Interorganizational Conversations

Defining Environmental Conflict

Environmental conflicts typically involve fundamental differences among parties relating to the environment (Emerson et al., 2003). Conflicts are long-term relationships that exist within broader social structures; differentiated between disputes, which are episodic and exist within conflicts (Birkhoff & Lowry, 2003; Putnam & Wondolleck,

2003). “Environmental” conflicts encompass all issues pertaining to the natural environment and its resources (Crowfoot & Wondolleck, 1991; Daniels & Walker, 2001). Sidaway (2005) has defined an environmental conflict as, “an unresolved disagreement between competing interest groups which has reached the public arena, is controversial and may have political consequences: i.e., one interest group is attempting to control the action of another, or its access to a semi-natural resource” (p. xiii).

Blackburn and Bruce (1995) note that environmental conflicts are often multiparty conflicts in that numerous interested parties clash with one another while engaged in a decision-making process pertaining to some action with potential impact on the environment. Both the proposed actions and decisions usually involve governmental agencies as well as parties representing the public’s interest. As a result, their visibility to the public eye is quite high (Emerson et al., 2003). “The environment and natural resources agencies are awash in protracted disputes that place a heavy burden on internal agency resources, the Department of Justice, and the court system” (Schaefer, 2012, p. 3). With today’s fast-paced global growth, interdependence among organizations is guaranteed to rise (Gray, 1989). This means that environmental issues not only attract a wide range of interests, but also that these interests are likely to continue to clash in controversial ways.

Daniels and Walker (2001) argue that environmental conflicts are the most complex of all conflict settings, due to the diversity among parties involved. These include native tribes, government agencies, scientists, interest groups, citizen coalitions and business interests, all with different amounts of power and legal standing. The

complexity of these conflicts is also the result of multiple issues contested, cultural differences (different cultures have different ways of communicating, which adds complexity), value and worldview differences, clash between scientific and lay knowledge (voice of scientist versus local citizen), legal requirements (procedural requirements for involving decision stakeholders lack incentive for creativity or innovation in engagement efforts), and a "litigious political tradition." Termed by Daniels and Walker as a "conflict industry," they argue that environmental conflicts are complex because perpetuating conflict keeps groups who thrive on litigation afloat by convincing members or constituents that they are fighting for them on issues they care about.

Categories of environmental conflict. Within the environmental conflict literature, there have been a number of attempts to categorize environmental conflicts; two themes among them in particular provide relevant background to this dissertation's case study. The first theme has been to categorize these conflicts based on their root causes. Capitini, Tissot, Carroll, Walsh, and Peck (2004) argue the three types of environmental conflict are: (1) interest or resource based, (2) identity or value based, and (3) mixed mode. Resource-based conflict emerges because of competing interests in a natural resource while identity-based conflict centers on parties' incommensurate values associated with particular resources. Mixed-mode conflicts, in their view, are a blend of the first two.

The second theme, represented here by the work of Putnam and Wondolleck (2003), categorize environmental conflicts based on their degree of difficulty in finding

resolution. Conflicts that last for a long time and seem to elude resolution are considered intractable, while shorter-term conflicts are tractable. Others in this theme have cast these conflicts as wicked or tame (Nie, 2003). It's no surprise that these conflicts attract enormous attention as they play out since they are viewed as, "controversial, acrimonious, symbolic, intractable, divisive, and expensive" which raises their public profile (Nie, 2003, p. 307-308). These kinds of environmental conflicts are expensive in time, resources and money to a broad range of parties and their frequency is expected to rise in the future (Nie, 2003). They are of particular interest because of the promise their effective management holds towards balancing human needs within the natural environment.

Sidaway (2005) describes an environmental conflict process inspired by Weber's (1948) power-based theory of social conflict that starts with the powerful protecting interests and continues with a latent phase marked by organization among weaker interests, uncertainty, and limited communication among divergent interests. Conflict emerges in an episode when an interest attempts to redistribute a resource (or challenge the status quo), and escalates through an active phase where interests use strategies to position themselves on the issue, and decision making process where the most powerful position wins, until the process begins anew in a future conflict episode. During this dynamic process, relationships among interests evolve. Using this framework, intractability becomes the result of reoccurring conflict where interests become further polarized in their positions, relationships grow destructively, and the conflict spiral deepens.

Intractable or wicked environmental conflicts involve more than just an issue of scientific or technical differences, but also a clashing of more deep-seated and tightly held values and beliefs. Crowfoot and Wondelleck (1991) highlight a number of value choices and conflicting worldviews that inform environmental conflict. For example, do you value the wild environment or land developed for human purposes? Do you feel compelled to protect species or not? Do you value future generations' enjoyment of environment or today's need for resource extraction and exploitation? These clashing worldviews are built off of socially constructed beliefs and values (Cahn & Abigail, 2013). Nie (2003) states that wicked environmental conflicts are driven by a host of factors including natural resource scarcity, policy design, incompatible conflict frames, strategic use of conflict for special interest gain, media coverage, governance structure that encourages division, ambiguity in government directives, and distrust among stakeholders. Thus, environmental conflicts are highly political in that they expose an intricate ecosystem of interdependent relationships among political, economic and social interests. This ecosystem is inhabited by a wide range of political actors seeking to influence environmental politics, policy and law, including those from private, public and government interests.

In this spiral of intractability, environmental conflict is often boiled down to an issue of us versus them, or "people against strangers" (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013, p. 531). Most often, the "us" are decision makers and the "them" are stakeholders dissatisfied with their level of influence in the decision-making process. Stakeholders are all parties, whether individual or organization, with an interest in the outcome of

environmental decisions (Gray, 1989). Stakeholder influence is afforded through public participation in government decision making by various landmark laws, most notably the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Environmental conflict is often conceptualized as the result of unfulfilled promise of public participation offered through NEPA.

What issues represent this intractable conflict potential? Balint et al. (2011) argue it is those issues that combine scientific uncertainty with contested values and conflict. Environmental conflicts are considered wicked when the problem is defined differently among stakeholders, reminiscent of the saying "where you stand depends on where you sit." Different ideas of the problem mean that stakeholders have different ideas of what the outcome should be. Wicked problems have murky solutions; it is not clear until often the consequences have been realized, to determine whether the chosen decision on these problems was the best one. For example, in the Navy-marine mammal issue, opponents to Navy training activities argue that by the time its' effects on marine mammals are fully understood, irreversible harm may have been caused to the populations of those species.

Managing Environmental Conflict

Environmental conflicts are most often treated in the literature in reference to their solution, not simply to be analyzed and understood. Conflict came to be viewed as something to be resolved, leading this mostly practice-based field to be termed "environmental conflict resolution" or ECR. The use of the terms "environmental dispute resolution" (EDR) and "environmental dispute settlement" have also emerged. It

is important to note that some scholars and practitioners use these terms interchangeably (for example Capitini et al., 2004) while others have deliberately selected terms to signify the different goals of "resolution" and "settlement" and the different contexts of "dispute" and "conflict" (Crowfoot & Wondolleck, 1991). Those in the latter category argue that ECR implies conflict is resolved for good, when in fact disputes, as short-term encounters can be resolved while a proliferation of difference (conflict) remains. In all cases, there is general consensus that these alternative methods of addressing environmental conflict are distinct from traditional decision-making because they promote collaboration between decision makers and non-decision makers.

Early attempts starting in the 1970s, the boom of the environmental movement in the United States, to manage environmental conflict, came in the form of mediation and negotiation (Crowfoot & Wondolleck, 1991). The formation of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR) in 1998 grew out of 20 years of ECR practice (Emerson et al., 2003). Borrowing principles and approaches from the legal world of alternative dispute resolution, USIECR intended to serve as the neutral third party among private and public stakeholders to resolve environmental conflicts involving governmental agencies. The formation of the USIECR reflected a growing legitimacy with policy focused collaborative efforts implemented at all levels of government (Daniels & Walker, 2001).

In recent years, the literature on ECR has seen a further level of specificity in the language used to describe its focus. In addressing intractable environmental conflicts, one cannot presume to be able to resolve them, so their management is more realistic.

Thus, some scholars and practitioners (or "pracademics" described by Senecah, 2004), choose instead to refer to this field as environmental conflict management more specifically. Reflecting a growing emphasis on collaboration and management, in 2012 then-USIECR director Mark Schaefer briefed the U.S. Department of Justice on federal ECR efforts, noting a need to refer to these efforts instead as "environmental collaboration and conflict resolution" (Schaefer, 2012). He argued the need for more collaboration upstream from conflict mediation because when collaboration is not used to address environmental tensions, parties turn to litigation. What has emerged in the field of ECR is collaboration promoted as the ideal way to manage clashing stakeholder interests in the environment.

Collaboration and managing environment conflict. Barbara Gray's (1989) definition of collaboration is often cited as the standard in environmental conflict literature: "Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited version of what is possible" (p. 5). Gray argues for a need to collaborate because intractable issues catch a wide range of interests, and when certain issues are dissatisfied with decisions handed down by formal decision-making processes, discontent leads to conflict escalation. Not without its fair share of criticism, collaboration continues to stand as an ideal alternative to traditional decision-making processes (Cox, 2013).

There has been confusion in the field regarding terminology used to describe collaborative approaches (Birkhoff & Lowry, 2003). Birkhoff and Lowry cut through

this confusion by referring to all alternative approaches addressing controversial environmental decisions as "collaborative problem solving and consensus building." Under this umbrella they include mediation, facilitation, collaborative learning and others, which are all distinct processes from one another. Since the purpose of this dissertation is not process-specific and for the sake of brevity, this review uses the term "collaboration" as a blanket term referencing all non-adversarial processes used to address controversial environmental decisions.

Collaboration has been used to address a wide range of intractable environmental conflicts, though a review by Bingham (1986) suggests those efforts have been concentrated largely around issues regarding land use, natural resource management, water management, energy, air quality and toxics. Collaboration can be mandated by environmental laws such as NEPA (Selin & Chavez, 1995). It may also be mandated by Congress in the form of appointed task forces to address environmental conflict. Mandated collaboration is on the rise as courts find themselves with more multiparty conflicts than they can settle (Gray, 1989). Furthermore, the public participation mandates within various laws pertaining to environmental decision-making require that decision-makers engage with stakeholders (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). While stakeholder engagement may not arise to the level of collaboration in these circumstances, it is the collaborative ideal within the field of ECR that drives parties with diverse interests and worldviews to interact with one another.

Sidaway (2005) notes that environmental conflicts are not just about issues, but also relationships. Deutsch (1973) argued that conflict is episodic, in that what happens

now will have an aftermath that affects the next episode among clashing parties. These conflicts are strung together to form the emergent relationships among disputing parties. From collaborative efforts aimed at addressing intractable environmental conflicts, emerge relationships among parties who might not otherwise interact with one another because of their diverse interests in the environment (Cox, 2013). These relationships are constituted through communication; the communicative practices of individuals interacting with each other as a result of the conflict situation they are involved in. In addressing tensions in environmental conflict, "it's all about relationships and communication" (Swanke, 2007, p. 232).

Communication in Environmental Conflict

The study of environmental conflict communication exists in an area of study within the field of environmental communication called environmental collaboration and conflict resolution (Cox, 2013). Work on the subject has included topics such as risk communication in public meetings (McComas 2001a; 2001b; 2003; McComas, Besley & Black, 2010), participatory communication (Cox, 2013; Endres, 2009; Peterson et al., 2007; Walker, 2007), the intersection of environmental planning and public participation (Depoe, Delicath & Elsenbeer, 2011; Martin, 2007) and consensus-building processes (Gwartney, Fessenden, & Landt, 2002; Low, 2008; Peterson et al., 2005). Scholars working in this area appreciate the centrality of communication in conflict situations, arguing that interaction among disputants is constituted through communication (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007; Putnam, 2013).

To make sense of the research that has been conducted in environmental conflict communication and where this dissertation is situated within it, it is worth noting the underlying assumptions that have influenced this body of work. The literature on environmental conflict communication has been based off of assumptions driving conflict communication scholarship more generally. Putnam (2013) emphasizes three key assumptions. First, the nature of conflict is socially constructed rather than a cognitive or material reality. Conflict does not exist "somewhere out there," but rather is created through relations among social members through communication. Second, every conflict is unique and thus requires tailored management approaches. Conflict communication is influenced by many factors driving the larger social structures in which conflict occur, and thus each situation is different. And third, conflict poses both problems and benefits. This assumption points to the transformative power of constructive conflict and the debilitating power of its destructive counterpart. These assumptions taken together suggest interplay between the social structures, systemic practices and relationships that constitute conflict.

Relational focus. Studies of interaction as constituted through communication highlight the relational dimension of intractable environmental conflicts. This dimension is hinged upon the quality of relationships among parties involved in the conflict (Walker, 1997). It examines the history among them in order to understand how the relationships evolved into their current state, for the purposes of making progress on the quality of their relationships. Walker (2013) likens this component to the portion of an iceberg below the water's surface: it's often hidden from view, difficult to discuss and

the cause of reoccurring conflict among parties. The relational dimension is of particular interest due to its key role in conflict management and forms the focus of this dissertation.

Earlier, it was noted that the relational aspect of wicked environmental conflict literature has centered on decision-maker-public relationships (Balint et al., 2011; Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). A closer look at the parties involved in these conflicts reveals the main voices in the public sphere as citizen groups, environmental groups, scientists, corporation/business lobbyists, anti-environmentalist groups, media, and public officials (Cox, 2013). These seven main groups of parties represent a diverse range of interests; consider that within the public official perspective alone are a myriad of government organizations that come to the table in an environmental conflict. This suggests a more complex reality of the interests involved in stakeholder engagement in these issues than what is captured by terming the relational dimension of intractable environmental conflict as public participation. Thus, while relationships among these interests have been characterized as multi-stakeholder, these parties have another attribute in common. They are all groups rather than individuals and often present themselves in these conflict situations as organizations (Sidaway, 2005).

Collaboration's popularity has risen with the growing number of societal issues that cross organizational boundaries (O'Leary & Vij, 2012). Individuals in their professional capacity as organizational members interact across organizational boundaries with other professionals. Their interaction is the result of their affiliate organizations' interests in the environment. From this interaction, organizational

members come to relate with others through professional working relationships. Rather than studying environmental conflicts as decision-makers versus stakeholders, this dissertation takes a different approach by characterizing interaction among parties as inter-organizational communication. Viewing these parties as organizations opens up an opportunity for exploring the ways in which organizations communicate across boundaries in environmental conflicts. Reflecting on the significance of this surrounding organizational context, this dissertation focuses on the inter-organizational communication that emerges during intractable environmental conflicts.

Examining inter-organizational communication is vital to understanding the success of collaborative relationships as it is the "currency" exchanged among networks of organizational members (Brummel, Nelson, & Jakes, 2012). Through collaborative communication, organizations deal with their differences constructively by developing mutual trust and understanding (Innes & Booher, 1999; Yaffee &Wondolleck, 2000). They also pool their resources and skills to address issues of mutual concern. These issues are tackled by dividing duties among organizations. In addition, they must coordinate with each other towards the ultimate goal. For example, in the present case under study, the Marine Mammal Commission, California Coastal Commission, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA/NMFS), the U.S. Navy, and environmental groups all have particular roles and duties they fulfill in addressing the Navy-marine mammal issue. Gwartney et al. (2002) have argued that working relationships among disputants are a worthwhile focus of inquiry in scholarship on such community-centered conflicts because they are an intangible outcome of management

processes. Such outcomes are hard to measure but important in an environment that increasingly emphasizes process evaluation. Gray (1989) offers one criteria for gauging success of collaboration as to whether communication and relationships among parties improved.

Many scholars have argued for the benefits of inter-organizational relationships in managing conflict. Bush and Folger (2004) maintain that transforming relationships among adversaries is more important than reaching agreement. Key to this improvement is if parties are able to see each other as similar to themselves, instead of employing an "us versus them" view. Caused by their long-term duration, intangible resources at stake (like values and identity), use of destructive communication, and polarity among parties, the "us" and "them" standpoints in intractable conflicts emphasize otherness (Sidaway, 2005). Otherness reinforces the boundaries that separate organizations rather than seeking commonalities. When communicating with organizational outsiders, "organizations are challenged to balance cooperation across boundaries with the traditional notion of an organization as a 'boundary reinforcing' entity with largely independent interests" (Brummel et al., 2012, p. 516). Promoting positive inter-organizational relationships reflect a commitment to the process of conflict management constituted in communication, rather than to outcomes (Gwartney et al., 2002; Sidaway, 2005). Developing positive working relationships among disputants is a promised benefit of collaborative efforts because of their power to "burn through" organizational and political boundaries (Brummel et al., 2012).

Peterson (1997) provides strong anecdotal evidence of relationship transformation among adversaries. She conducted research on a farming community in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, where conflict was brewing as a result of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recent ban on pesticides. Central to local farming operations, use of pesticides threatened an endangered species. A core group of individuals with entrepreneurial spirit tried to get members from all sides of the conflict to come together in collaboration but found many hesitant to "sit down at the table with the enemy" (p. 149). In the first meeting, the disputing parties looked at each other with a great deal of otherness, but within less than a year of collaborative effort, found they were willing to work together to benefit all. They submitted recommendations to the EPA they felt more effectively balanced the farming and conservation interests. Their collaboration even surprised an EPA official, who was told by environmental lobbyists that they needed to listen to the collaborative group's recommendations. He later said, "I never had anybody from the environmental community ever tell me to listen to a farmer" (p. 152). Peterson describes the pride with which members from all sides spoke of their colleagues in other organizations. This unusual sense of relationship caught the EPA's attention and eventually they did adopt the group's recommended changes to the ban. Down the road, members from the different parties spoke highly of those they had developed connection with through working relationships. Managing the communication of diverse viewpoints among organizational interests in these working relationships lent them strength.

Focus and Rationale for Study #1

The conversations that emerge among individuals interacting in environmental conflict are likely to be difficult. Difficult conversations are discussions among individuals who grapple with disagreement on what has or should happen regarding an issue and in which their emotionally-charged exchanges raise challenges to their self-image and self-esteem (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010). Difficult conversations emerge over a variety of issues affecting both public (Knight, 2015) and private life (Keating, Russell, Cornacchione, & Smith, 2013). They are likely to emerge in environmental conflicts because these issues are often marked by sustained contention among diverse stakeholders who interact with one another during environmental decision-making processes (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013; Sidaway, 2005). In these conflict situations, stakeholders confront their value differences (Vining & Tyler, 1999) and different forms of expertise or ways of discussion environmental issues (Endres, 2009)

Understanding what happens in these difficult conversations requires an examination of interaction among the individuals who become involved in environmental decision-making processes. Within the communication research, researchers have tended to focus on conversations that take place in public forums such as public meetings, and that which involve decision makers and citizens (Cox, 2013; Depoe, Delicath & Elsenbeer, 2011; McComas, 2001a; 2001b; Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). While these conversations are important, what gets ignored is that many individuals who are involved in environmental conflicts are often representatives of organizations who interaction across both public and more private settings (Sidaway,

2005). We know little about their inter-organization conversations, which is unfortunate because conceiving of conversations in environmental conflicts as a matter of experts versus citizens is not accurate (Endres, 2009). Interorganizational conversations are important because they involve key players in the issue yet we do not know about their conversational dynamics in private or semi-private settings. The dynamics among these representatives may be completely different behind closed doors compared to public interaction (Friedman, 1994). Thus, investigating conversations across both public and private settings is valuable for understanding the nature of difficult conversations that emerge in environmental conflict. Thus, the first study of this dissertation poses the following question:

RQ1: What are the interactional challenges representatives encounter in inter-organizational conversations and the issues they pose and what strategies do representatives use to manage them?

Emotion, Difficult Conversations, and Environmental Conflict

Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor (1995) argue that individuals who are part of working relationships will always experience feelings toward each other and the issue at hand. Individuals bring "old feelings" from their past experiences into present interaction, which give way to "present-time feelings," which manifest as emotional experiences in present day conversations. In the context of intractable environmental conflicts that enjoy sustained public attention, it is highly likely that organizational representatives

engaged in difficult conversations will experience their own emotion and the emotion of others and have to manage it. Sidaway (2005) says that it is the emotive issues that make it on to the public arena, not the boring ones, and when one considers that emotions are located in politics; tied to the value-laden issues that sustain the public agenda, the relationships between organizational representatives are likely to be emotionally-charged. Emotion plays a role within the interorganizational conversations characterizing environmental conflict because emotions are inherently part of difficult conversations among individuals with diverse interests (Stone et al., 2010).

Putnam (2013) argues that the study of emotion in conflict communication requires additional attention. Bodtker and Jameson (2001) claim that "emotion is the foundation of all conflict" (p. 219). The cause of conflict is closely tied to the generation of emotions as, "emotions occur in reaction to stimuli that threaten to interrupt, impede, or enhance one's goals" (Guerrero, 2013, p. 106). Conflict is triggered by events that also elicit emotion, "To recognize that we are in conflict is to acknowledge that we have been triggered emotionally" (Jones, 2000, p. 91). To understand the role communication in environmental conflict, I begin by defining emotion and its management and then explore the role of emotion in environmental conflict.

Defining and Managing Emotion

Scholars have had difficulty defining emotion (Guerrero et al., 1998). One definitional attempt has been to identify the criteria common to emotions, namely that that they are internal states, and that they are affective (Ortony, Clore & Foss, 1987). Further attempts aim to distinguish emotion from mood and affect. Moods are more

general and longer lasting feeling states (Morris, 1992). Affect refers to the underlying cognitive reaction to an event and is often thought of as having a positive or negative valence (Batson, Shaw, & Oleson, 1992). This valence forms the core of the experience and expression of emotion (Guerrero et al., 1998). Noting this expression of emotion draws attention to a distinction between emotion as an internal state and emotion as a socially responsive feeling. For purposes of this dissertation, emotion is defined as a personal reaction to an experience. Individuals experience distinct emotions by appraising an event for its personal relevance and responding to the event in particular ways (Nabi, 2003).

Scholars have attempted to identify those emotions most relevant to conflict situations. Guerrero (2013) poses a typology of conflict emotions that blends previous categorizations based on type of affect, degrees of arousal, direction of focus and type of action tendency (see Christensen, Jacobson & Babcock, 1995; Bell & Song, 2005). Her resulting comprehensive typology differentiates between hostile, vulnerable, flat, positive, self-conscious, and fearful emotions. Hostile emotions such as anger and jealousy are linked to destructive communication marked by tendencies to attack and show aggression. Vulnerable emotions are considered soft emotions such as hurt and sadness that are experienced from other's behavior. Flat emotions such as apathy and indifference communicate neglect. Positive emotions communicate closeness or goal achievement and include respect and empathy. Guilt is felt when one feels like they have fallen short of expectations and is labeled as a self-conscious emotion. Finally, fearful

emotions are characterized by avoidance either because one doesn't want to hurt or be hurt by another.

Emotion is comprised of cognitive, physiological, and behavioral components (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Lazarus, 1994). The cognitive component of emotion refers to the way that events are appraised in the environment and the responses they elicit. Physiologically, emotion is "felt" in the body. These bodily reactions, or feelings, are manifestations of changes in arousal levels (Guerrero, 2013). The combination of these first two components, biological and sociological (Lewis & Saarni, 1985) makes up the behavioral component. This component refers to individuals' tendency to take action in particular ways in an emotional experience. People can avoid or approach events that stimulate emotional experiences (Guerrero, 2013). Individuals become socialized within culture to express emotions in particular ways. This last point suggests the socially constructed nature of emotions.

Scholars have recently begun to view emotion as a social construction. Viewing emotion as socially constructed places communication at the heart of how conflict is created, framed, sustained and changed (Jones, 2000). As opposed to the psychology and neuroscience literature that tends to view emotion as cognition and an internal phenomenon (Kennedy & Vining, 2007; Nabi, 2003), studying emotion as socially constructed views emotions as social, rather than internal phenomenon (Guerrero et al, 1998). Several principles underlie the social constructionist approach to emotion. First, Jones (2000) points to the socially constructed nature of emotion and how scholars vary from viewing emotion as wholly socially and culturally constructed to those who see

emotion as biologically-predetermined. Second, emotions from a social constructionist view are elicited from subjective interpretations of environmental events. The same event can therefore have multiple interpretations and elicit multiple emotional responses in people. The subjective emotional experience becomes crucial in determining how someone derives meaning from an event.

Third, emotions follow "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1983). These rules tell people how they should feel in response to an event while "emotion work" describes their effort to act out these rules. These feelings derive from cultural and social expectations about what one should do. Fourth, emotion is constituted in communication through a socially and culturally situated discourse. Planalp (1999) explains this principle with an example of Utku Eskimo culture where children are socialized to emotion norms through their interaction with elders.

Fifth, emotions have a moral element to their expression. Jones (2000) says emotional communication is a "moral frame through which relationships in conflict…are understood" (p. 94). When we communicate emotions, we are telling others who are in relation with us, what we think are the values and moral "rightness" of that relationship. Finally, the sixth principle of emotion is that people become acculturated to Hochchild's feeling rules as they develop. Thus, individuals learn through social interaction what emotion is and how they should express it. Our definition of conflict is based on the emotions privileged through "feelings rules" perpetuated in a culture. Jones distinguishes between emotions experienced and expressed by pointing to one's control of emotion expression and the varying degrees of intensity of emotion in conflict.

I follow the lead of Bodtker and Jameson (2001) by studying emotion as emotional expression, thus highlighting their presence in the social environment. The presence of emotions is assessed through various cues observed in sensory channels (Planalp, 1999). Planalp points out that individuals have feelings, but that there is a fuzzy line between genuine feelings and feelings altered by one's cultural and social environment. Referring to the innate nature of cognitive emotions, she argues that emotional expression might be controllable while the internal feelings linked to those emotions probably is not. The controllable nature of emotional expression is viewed in the literature as the management of emotions.

The scholarship on emotion management indicates that emotions are managed in a variety of ways including managing their expression, the physiological reaction they elicit, the situations that promote them, and the appraisal of these situations (Planalp, 1999). Strategies for managing emotional expression include following "display rules" for expression of the emotion at the surface, and more deeply, "feeling rules" for shaping the emotions themselves (Hochchild, 1979; 1983). Physiological methods of management work to manage the physical component of emotional responses such as exercise or relaxation techniques (Planalp, 1999). Situations can be controlled in the aim of managing emotions in a way to avoid/promote the feelings that lead to particular emotions. Planalp uses the example of construction workers who control their work environment by clearing away potentially hazardous materials that pose a threat of frustration or sadness caused by bodily harm. Finally, emotion can be managed by altering our appraisal of the emotion-eliciting event in the first place. This can be done

by changing the language used to talk about events (for example, not focusing solely on talking about the problem), managing how much attention we give to the event (focusing on other less emotional events) and using humor to detach emotionally from the event (making a joke to diffuse anger).

Emotions in Environmental Conflict

The study of emotional expression within intractable environmental conflicts begins with examining how people assign values to the environment. These values include economic and aesthetic values (Satterfield, 2001). When emotions are expressed, they indicate the values of their owner (Jones, 2000). Values are a key part of the environmental planning process in that they: (1) help stakeholders sort through a vast body of information on what environmental issues are worth their attention and which can be ignored, and (2) expose value differences among stakeholders that lead to conflict (Vining & Tyler, 1999).

Emotions can emerge in environmental conflicts as a result of contested meanings of place. This scholarship relates to place attachment (Manzo, 2003) and motivations to act when place is threatened (Buijs et al., 2011). Place attachment is an emotional sensitivity to a particular place which influences how one experiences and values it (Manzo, 2003). This emotional sensitivity is in part a social construction based on previous experience (Gunderson & Watson, 2007). Conflicts arise when parties assign different values to places; they experience different place attachment. Place attachment can develop from one's close proximity to a particular place; for example in response to unwanted development proposals such as landfill siting (Cass & Walker,

2009; Creighton, Blatner, & Carroll, 2008). It develops through place dependence and place identity. Place dependence is a reliance on place to achieve one's goals (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). Place identity refers to the symbolic importance of place that gives meaning to relationships (Williams & Vaske 2003). Some places act as "a warehouse for emotions and relationships that provide significance and meaning to life" (Gunderson & Watson, 2007, p. 718). For example, loggers may be attached to a forest because of its value as a source of employment while conservationists may be attached to that same forest because of its value as the home of an endangered species.

As conflicts wear on, issues of identity become deeply enmeshed in the relationships among parties. Satterfield (2002) found this to be the case while studying a conflict surrounding old-growth forests and owl conservation. This study revealed that as conflict wore on, loggers came to see themselves living under a stigma that dismissed their views as those of "drunken, piggish louts whacking down trees with reckless abandon" (p. 71). Issues of identity are closely linked with place attachment (Satterfield, 2002). The meanings of environmental places go deeper than their functional use. For example, O'Brien (2006) found that stakeholders valued a Vermont forest more so because of what it meant to their personal and community identity, than its value as wildlife habitat.

In addition to conflict based on contested meanings of place, studies on the emotional nature of environmental conflict have also focused on emotional expression in environmental decision-making processes. For example, the literature has examined

emotion in public meetings (Beck, Littlefield, & Weber, 2012; Cass & Walker, 2009; Vining & Tyler, 1999). Dealing with the emotional responses to environmental decisions is itself considered a wicked conflict because technical and scientific-based decision-makers are not skilled at dealing with this human dimension of the conflict (Vining, 1992). It is this tendency on the part of decision-makers favoring technical and scientific responses to decisions that has led to the de-legitimization of emotional expression in environmental conflicts.

Environmental conflicts represent an intersection between scientific and emotional discourse (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). On the one hand, these conflicts almost always involve making decisions in the face of scientific uncertainty or incomplete data on the environmental impacts of an action. Scientific and technical understandings are important for weighing the evidence in the face of this uncertainty. Here, rational decision-making processes are idealized (McComas, 2003). On the other hand, environmental conflicts involve contested environmental valuation leading to diverse interests. When interests compete on emotionally sensitive issues, parties express concerns using emotive language. A dialectical approach to conflict re-examines the traditional emphasis on the rational in conflict research and uncovers the underprivileged other end of the conflict orientation duality, which is the irrational or emotional dimension of conflict (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Putnam, 2013).

In reviewing the literature on emotion in environmental conflicts, one is faced with the stark realization that emotion has been painted as something inherently negative, to be minimized and controlled. Expressing emotions indicates values and

threatened values are common place in environmental conflicts that involve policy tradeoffs (Vining & Tyler, 1999). Rational values are those that "make sense" given a desired outcome while non-rational values are dismissed as superfluous and "wrong" (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). Given the strong role of science in most environmental conflicts, rational decision-making and weighing of objective evidence has been emphasized. However, environmental conflicts are not only about contested science. Non-rational values indicate what issues are important to the parties involved; their interests or stake in an environmental issue.

Emotional expression has been studied as a characteristic of public stakeholders (Cox, 2013; Senecah, 2004; Vining & Tyler, 1999). These public stakeholders are often considered to have less power than decision-makers therefore issues of trust and influence have been connected to the expression of emotions as responses to perceived dissatisfaction with decision outcomes or processes (Senecah, 2004). In conveying concerns of a non-scientific nature, stakeholders confront significant barriers to emotional expression. For example, when considering public meetings, the site most commonly host to public participation in environmental decision-making, rules delineating appropriate communicative behaviors structure rational discussion and discourage emotional expression (McComas, 2003). These two types of talk are seen as incommensurate and because science is privileged, attempts to speak in emotional terms are left unfulfilled (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Emotional testimonials get dismissed, so if one wants to build credibility for what they have to say, they have to appear "impassioned and factual" (Satterfield, 2002, p. 87). For decision-makers looking

to manage the environmental decision-making process with efficiency, "emotion interferes with action" (p. 139).

In this way, public officials have been mostly characterized as being on the receiving end of emotional expression (Cox, 2013). However, there is limited research that suggests emotion play a role in the communicative practices of organizational representatives involved in environmental conflicts. In one of the few cases addressing emotion as a non-public characteristic, Kennedy and Vining (2007) carried out a study that examined the influence of emotion on the relationship between land managers and scientists in environmental decision-making processes. Their findings offered insight into the emotional nature of environmental conflict, suggesting that managers' emotions also influenced inter-organizational communication in collaborative efforts. This study is one of few to point emotional communication research in a direction other than public organizations. One explanation for this lack of attention paid to non-public organizations may be linked to the organizational constraints that these individuals communicate under. For example, when considering the responses of decision-makers and environmental managers, there does not seem to be any room for professional expression of emotion amid the legal norms for objective decision making surrounding mandated collaboration (Dietz, Stern & Rycroft, 1989). These same norms are not imposed on the public, who are largely dismissed as flawed by their irrationality.

Vining (1992) sought greater explanation for the lack of emotional expression among decision-makers and managers suggested in both research and practice. Her study revealed that they felt desensitized to environmental issues they addressed daily in their

line of work. Emotions experienced by these representatives stemmed from their perceived threats to their job. For example, some managers experienced anger when their proposed actions were criticized by stakeholders who they felt were holding them back from performing their duties. Additionally, despite an emotional desensitization to the actual environmental issues faced in their work, they pointed out they still maintained an emotional connection to the environment which had attracted them to their careers in the first place. Thus, there was a difference between representatives' personal and organizational emotions: the former was not expressed in favor of keeping up appearances in line with their job. This tension represents the influence that organizations have over their members specifically as they relate to emotional expression. Related work in this area has been studied as emotional communication in the workplace.

From previous research, we know that people face emotions in the workplace. Some occupations have been identified as more emotion-intensive than others, thus workers in these environments have been termed emotional laborers. "Emotional labor" entails a "real self-fake self" dichotomy where workers separate their true feelings from those on public display, for the sake of falling in line with organizational norms of emotional expression for a profit (Hochschild, 1983; Tracy & Tretheway, 2005). Waldron (2012) provides an overview of jobs where workers face emotional labor including flight attendants and 911 operators for example. In contrast emotional labor, or emotional management as paid labor, is differentiated from emotion work, or emotional management for the sake of following organizational norms (Miller et al., 2007).

In either case organizational structures, both formal and informal, encourage or discourage which emotions will be expressed and how; referred to as "display rules" (Hochchild, 1979; 1983). Previous research on workplace emotion has described how organizational norms influence these rules (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Diefendorff et al., 2011; Fiebig & Kramer, 1998). This area of research has also debated the role of communication in constructing emotions amid these norms (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Tracy, 2004; Tracy & Tretheway, 2005). This research highlights that emotional expression is based in the interactions that workers have in their workplace.

Focus and Rationale for Study #2

Relatively little is known about the construction and management of the emotionally-charged interorganizational conversations faced by organizational representatives in environmental conflict. This is surprising given that emotion is not only felt by individuals in conflict, but that it's expression a common occurrence in such highly public and controversial issues. While scholars have argued for the importance of emotion in interpersonal conflict (Guerrero, 2013; Planalp, 1999), and organizational conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001), relatively little scholarship has been devoted to interorganizational conflict in the environmental context. Additionally, communication scholars have centered on emotion in organizations (Waldron, 2012). This focus is valuable for exposing the "emotional tissues" (Waldron, 2012; p. 2) in organizational life. However, in this work emotion is considered only a characteristic within

organizational boundaries, not as a practice that negotiated through communication in inter-organizational relationships.

It is likely that organizational representatives working on the edge of their organizations will encounter other representatives who operate under different organizational norms for expressing emotion. Planalp (1999) points to what seems to be two different streams of organizational discourses regarding emotion with traditional discourse privileging strategic rational discourse and alternative discourse foregrounding the spontaneous emotional communication, respectively. Individuals affiliated with organizations that prize rationality over emotionality may find themselves face-to-face with outsiders in environmental conflict that have the opposite view. For example, bureaucratic organizations may value emotional suppression due to their long-privileged view of rationality and its benefit to decision-making while alternative organizations may value emotion as a resource that benefits decision-making (Planalp, 1999). These norms, whether originating within the organization alone or from more systemic constraints, form a culture of emotion management in organizations that may come into conflict with other cultures (Satterfield, 2002).

Organizational members involved in environmental conflict are often challenged by their "occupational psychoses" and need to see beyond the emotional expressions of outsiders to the threatened interests they represent, if relationships are to be built across organizational boundaries (Peterson, 1997, p. 155). Once members interact outside the boundaries of their organization, they must negotiate with diverse organizational norms and styles pertaining to emotional expression. Considering that emotions are central in

environmental conflict-related inter-organizational conversations, it would be useful to have a deeper understanding in how the influential role of emotion might spill into the working relationships that emerge among parties involved. We need a better understanding of the role that emotional expression plays when organizational representatives communicate beyond organizational boundaries. Thus, the second study of this dissertation focuses on the following research question:

RQ2: What is the role of emotion in representatives' interorganizational conversations and what emotion management strategies do they employ?

Engaged Scholarship, Environmental Conflict, and Difficult Conversations

In undertaking this dissertation, I became interested in not only difficult conversations among organizational representatives but also those between researchers and organizational representatives. Since researchers are entering into contentious conversational landscapes, in which organizational representatives struggle with their own difficult conversations, researcher conversations with this population may also be quite difficult. In this dissertation, one of my interests was to take an engaged scholarship approach to the study of difficult conversations where I look at how the research relationship is co-created through conversations among researcher and participants. Furthermore, I was interested to explore what interactional challenges emerge as I conduct research conversation with my participants and how I manage them. My research position is influenced by my commitments to engaged scholarship, a

research approach built off of a social constructionism orientation towards qualitative research.

Qualitative methodology focuses on rich descriptions of phenomena and exploring more deeply "What is going on here?" by studying the performance and practice of communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Qualitative communication researchers prize an emic approach to research which means they build theory from patterns recognized through observation. Researchers operating within this approach may be thought of as "bricoleurs" (Tracy, 2013, p. 26) who weave together various partial glimpses into a phenomenon towards developing an insightful perspective of the focus of their study.

As will be discussed in the methodology section, I adopt a social constructionist view to social research, which can be explored using an engaged approach. Social constructionism is an approach to social research that see taken-for-granted realities as in fact socially constructed and researchers operating from this perspective take great interest in studying how this is so (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). These realities are produced in human relationships and therefore there is great emphasis on studying patterns of communication considered the foundation of inter-subjective experience (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). These patterns, indeed our words, create social worlds (Browne, 2008). Social constructionism was inspired by the phenomenological tradition by Berger and Luckmann (1966; cited in Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009); a tradition which emphasized the pursuit of understanding perspectives or verstehen (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Social constructionism is a middle-ground approach on the continuum of

qualitative methodology that emphasizes generating description and understanding of how people see the world and communicate within it (Ellingson, 2008). Thus the conversation is an important site of communication from this perspective (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2004).

Since reality is socially constructed, social constructionists are interested in understanding how people, individually and collectively, derive meaning from their experiences and how they communicate in relationships (Easterby-Smith et al., 2004). Emphasis is placed on understanding feelings and thoughts within this interaction (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). From this view, it is considered that language invites particular meanings. This puts into focus the reflexive actions of those in relationship and how that reflection creates structures (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Structures are created from socially-constructed reality which, in turn affect the subjective experience. Thus, social constructionism highlights the way we communication through language, the context of our communication, and the way we derive meaning from relationships.

I see my research as an opportunity to not only study the relationships within environmental conflicts but also engage in relationships with the representatives involved during the course of the research process. Such an opportunity invites an engaged scholarship approach to research. This approach addresses a variety of types of research including applied communication research, collaborative learning research, activism and social justice research, practical theory, and public scholarship (Putnam & Dempsey, 2015). Such research is not viewed as relevant for practice, but rather with practice; a distinction created by focusing on the "recursive and reflexive practices"

(Simpson & Seibold, 2008, p. 270) that bridge theory and practice. Researchers perform each step of their research by stepping outside of their own understanding and consulting others for their interpretations of those steps to help them carry out their research. The relevance of the research with practice advances what we know on a topic.

Engaged scholars are less interested in abstract decontextualized knowledge, but rather in generating richly contextualized practical knowledge that is socially relevant (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Dempsey & Barge, 2014). This form of scholarship looks at participants as co-researchers, not data collection sites (Simpson & Seibold, 2008). It is not focused on individual goals, but rather collective achievement or "co-generative theorizing" (Deetz, 2008). It fulfills a responsibility to ensure that academic research also gives back to the community in which participants face some sort of communication phenomena (Simpson &Seibold, 2008).

In this approach to research, researchers engage with participants in order to collaborate on a study of mutual interest, pursue some policy change, or design and carry out an intervention in their community. This shift in the researcher-participant relationship means that great value is placed on not only research for the purposes of meeting the researcher's theoretical needs, but also those that are practical for participants' experiences. This shift emphasizes reflexivity, as research addresses the interpretations and needs of both researchers and participants, and continuously evolves to maintain a collaborative spirit between both (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

This shift also means that people who are normally restricted from the research design process, such organizational representatives, may challenge researchers' way of

thinking and move them in different directions (Van de Ven, 2007). Researchers need to take these challenges into consideration and respond to them. Upholding the theory-with-practice emphasis of engaged scholarship requires that scholars develop and demonstrate practical skills to initiate and preserve collaborative relationships with participants.

Such collaborative relationships may be challenging in environmental conflict research given that engaged scholars interact with conflicting organizations simultaneously on complex issues that may threaten their neutral research position. Engaged scholars need to maintain an ethical and neutral stance that protects participants (Cheney, 2008) while also protecting themselves (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Thus when researchers interact with their participants during the research process, challenging interactions can result. Inherent in confronting such interactions, is the need for reflexivity, whereby scholars engage in self-awareness and reflection to remain responsive to the fluid and dynamic research settings in which they conduct themselves (Finlay, 2002). By remaining reflexive, scholars acknowledge their influence in shaping the research process (Cunliffe, 2003).

An engaged scholarship approach is relevant to the study of difficult conversations undertaken in this dissertation in that as a researcher investigating the Navy-marine mammal issue, I found myself positioned among six different organizations whose representatives shared with me their conflict and concerns with each other. In such a position as I was in, engaged scholars can use reflexive practice in order to cultivate self-awareness and reflection of their positionality as researcher in

these interorganizational settings. This positionality as an engaged scholar is such that they need to harness the different meanings that they and diverse representatives hold of the utility of knowledge and expectations of the research process (Dempsey & Barge, 2013).

Dempsey and Barge (2014) suggest that three main tensions associated with conducting engaged scholarship refer to (1) representation-intervention, (2) distance-empathy, and (3) scholar-practitioner roles. The first tension refers to the extent to which research describes or intervenes in organization and community issues. The second tension remarks on the distance that scholars keep from participating organizations: too much distance and scholars cannot develop meaningful collaboration, but too little distance and scholars risk losing their academic freedom to provide critical reflection of organizational practices. The scholar-practitioner role tension highlights that researchers and their non-academic collaborators have different interests in the process and product of research. For example, issues of time, resources and deliverables are viewed differently if one reports to academic norms versus business norms (Simpson & Seibold, 2008).

Dempsey and Barge (2014) suggest these tensions may be managed through three general strategies including: (1) co-design, (2) co-missioning, and (3) co-enactment. Co-designed research is marked by close relationships among collaborators in order to carry out deliberate design conversations that respond to changing needs during the research process. Such efforts seek to ensure that projects are designed and implemented in ways that pose value to all. Co-missioning is a strategy for researchers

and participants to negotiate the scope of the project. In co-missioning conversations, collaborators work together to form pluralistic definitions of the issues being addressed. The goal is to be able to leverage the expertise of different individuals in order to create an enhanced research design. Third, co-enactment is offered as a strategy for working together in the interpretation and implementation phases of the project. Unlike traditional models of conducting research where researchers effectively "own" what happens to the data they collect, co-enactment points to the need for participants to have an active hand in those decisions. They may help researchers fact check their analysis of the data (Meares et al., 2004). Additionally, they may collaborate on proposed change initiatives within an organization using research findings (Simpson & Seibold, 2008).

While this previous work has noted challenges experienced by engaged scholars, and offered general strategies, we know relatively little about concrete practices to manage these challenges. Dempsey and Barge (2014) highlight the importance of moving towards a set of such practices in order develop guidance for maintaining the democratizing ideals that collaborative research aims for. However further research is needed to being to articulate such practices. Thus, the third study in this dissertation poses the following research question:

> RQ3: What are the situated challenges associated with engaged researcher-participant relationships and conversations and what strategies do researchers use to manage them?"

Methodology

Research Positionality

I first became interested in the Navy-marine mammal issue as an undergraduate studying veterinarian medicine who was developing a particular interest in marine mammal science. This issue has continued to fascinate me over the years because it combines my love for the ocean with my lifelong curiosity for how people in dispute may more constructively manage their conflict. My academic interests have evolved from science, through law and policy and I've now come to see the issue as rooted in communication. The Navy-marine mammal issue has all the makings of a good movie, with its years of litigation played out in the media and a dramatic plot some have described as pitting a friendly dolphin named Flipper against the evil Navy. My professional and academic experiences interacting within animal welfare organizations, the Navy, and science-focused research institutes tell me otherwise. I have developed great respect for the work that these and other various organizations do pertaining to environmental issues and have come to see that conflicts like the Navy-marine mammal issue are a matter of difference, not right versus wrong.

I view researching such issues as an opportunity to offer descriptions of conflict situations and then also suggest communication process improvements. Environmental conflicts emerge in environmental management efforts, and yet lengthy contentious interaction and litigation seem to overshadow what should be the real focus, which is finding ways to meaningfully balance human activity with environmental impact. This seems unfortunate to me and begs for greater attention to be paid to finding ways to put

the focus back on sound environmental management. My stance in this regard informs my view of research as a political act (Conquergood, 1995). I am not an objective bystander who simply researches a social conflict but then steps back from the situation so I can claim innocence in the knowledge I produce. I don't stand objectively from the world; rather I stand within the world (Van de Ven, 2007). I seek to be involved in the social conflicts that unfold around me, through my research contributions. It is my intent as a communication researcher to generate useful knowledge that moves us closer to finding paths towards durable decisions in conflict situations.

In studying conflict situations, I look to weave together the subjective realities of individual experience towards developing a richer understanding of what is happening. Fisher and Ury (2011) once asserted that, "conflict lies not in objective reality, but rather in people's heads…their thinking is the problem" (p. 22), and their insight has greatly informed my approach to research. I focus on how individuals perceive their conflict and in doing so emphasize understanding their feelings and perceptions (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). What I find most important about understanding subjective realities is how they are constructed in interaction in social settings. Highlighting a social constructionism view on research, I see the reality of conflict situations as socially constructed. My research calls attention to how people communicate in relationships (Easterby-Smith et al., 2004).

While I affiliate myself with the social constructionist point of view and am critical of purely positivistic approaches to inquiry that attempt to reduce social phenomena to statistics and correlations, I do find merit in the post-positivistic view.

This view accepts there are complex realities that exist outside of subjective experience while also acknowledging that subjective experiences are partial but useful. I value both subjective and objective realities in the conflict situations I study. I recognize the multiple perspectives of individuals are significant yet partial views of conflict, and I also appreciate being able to triangulate their perceptions with externally-derived knowledge and observations of those situations. I believe that weaving together these various forms of data develop a more robust understanding of phenomena (Tracy, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007).

My methodological approach is further shaped by a strong emphasis in pursuing engaged scholarship. My emphasis on the co-production of knowledge aligns with Van de Ven's (2007) definition of engaged scholarship as "a participative form of research for obtaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders (researchers, users, clients, sponsors and practitioners) in studying complex problems" (p. 9). Thus it benefits from the pluralistic methodology I use in my research. I seek to form collaborative relationships with participants because I think this enhances the utility of research towards addressing complex social problems (Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Given my view that subjective realities in interaction are crucial for understanding conflict situations, I am led to understand issues from their perspective so that resulting interventions that might flow from my research align with, and in fact capitalize on, their knowledge of a situation. Thus, at its core, I see my research positionality as driven by my sense of responsibility for giving back to communities useful knowledge as a public service (Simpson &Seibold, 2008).

Interview Methodology

I collected data using qualitative interviews because I was interested in learning the subjective experiences and interpreted meanings of my participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013). I used a semi-structured approach to conduct the interviews because I wanted to retain flexibility in being able to adjust the order of questioning in line with the flow of the emergent interview as well as to be able to probe more deeply on particularly intriguing insights (Tracy, 2013). Appendix A provides the interview guide I created and used for this study.

The interview guide was designed to collect data on the: (1) landscape of difficult conversations regarding the Navy-marine mammal issue, and (2) the emotional experience within these conversations. I picked these two topics because they enabled me to capture the "lay of the land" on the issue, which addressed RQ1 regarding interactional challenges, and then to probe deeper into representatives' experiences navigating this map of conversations, which addressed RQ2 regarding emotion.

In order to map out the difficult conversations occurring on the issue, I developed a set of questions that enabled me to explore with participants what the nature of their experiences in conversations were. I asked them the "who, what, where, when and how" pertaining to these conversations. For example, my questions asked who they had conversations with, in what settings those conversations took place, and what they discussed. What this did was effectively enabled me to create a map of conversations that each participant experienced.

Interviews were conducted in person or over the phone when that was not feasible. In both cases, I drew out the map and then referred to the map in subsequent questions. Specifically, I would point to, or ask them to visual, a map of their conversations and ask them to indicate which were relatively difficult and which were relatively easier. This enabled me to identify within each participants map, distinctions relating to the quality of their experience, and then ask follow up questions for the reason behind their distinctions. Developing a map and then distinguishing between easy and difficult conversations were two moves I made in interviews with the goal of understanding how people construct what a difficult conversation is.

My next move was to probe deeper into participants' experiences to explore their feelings in conversations. I engaged them in a line of questions concerning how they felt in conversations, how they managed those feelings, and their perceptions of their success at managing them. These questions enabled me to dig deeper into any potential emotional experiences in conversations that representatives had experienced. My goal in these questions was to understand the logic behind peoples' communicative behavior in difficult conversations. In total, I conducted these interviews with twenty-nine individuals. Interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes in length, in variation from my planned 60 minute timeframe. When interviews lasted longer, it was because I needed more time to ask questions, and I requested additional time from any participant with whom this was the case. The interviews totaled 36 hours.

Interview Sample

I used a purposeful sampling technique in my study to generate my sample (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I started with my established contacts in each organization because these were individuals who I knew satisfied my criterion, namely that they are or were involved directly with the Navy-marine mammal conflict through their affiliation with an organization. This is called criterion sampling and was defined at first by who I knew of that was relevant to the issue. I began the dissertation thinking that the relevant organizations involved in the Navy-marine mammal issue were the Navy, the various environmental NGOs comprising the environmental community, and NMFS.

Because my goal was to represent the complete network of key individuals working on this, I went further to discover who else might satisfy my criteria. I amassed a set of public documents that listed key individuals on the issue, in order to identify potential participants. I looked for people who were described or depicted in these documents as interacting with representatives from other organizations. Then I contacted those individuals to solicit their participation, however when I was unsure whether they met the criteria or not, I needed to include in my solicitation materials what the criteria for participation were.

I also used snowball sampling to recruit individuals at any additional organizations that these established contacts indicated as key players in the conflict. Snowball sampling is especially important for studying this conflict given that finding contact information for governmental workers, especially those involved in Defense work, can be unavailable to the public. I relied on participants' suggestions of additional

contacts in order to identify potential additional participants. One of the complexities with studying conversations that take place outside of public view is that it is harder to ascertain who is involved in those conversations. Often times, the individuals who were suggested to me through snowball sampling, were visible in the public domain but there were no obvious indicators that they were involved in the Navy-marine mammal issue. Thus, snowball sampling was very valuable in identifying professionals with specific experience on the issue.

Through both sampling techniques, I was trying to access the full network of individuals who had been or were currently involved in conversations with other representatives. I had contacts in the relevant organizations stemming from a previous research project but more often than not, needed to develop new contact with individuals. While I began the project considering only three key relevant organizational affiliations, by the end of the project, I had identified a total of seven based on both sampling techniques: (1) the Navy, (2) NMFS (and its parent agency the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), (3) the environmental community, (4) the scientific community, the Marine Mammal Commission, the California Coastal Commission, and the Department of Justice.

The participants represented a range of organizational levels from staff to senior ranking officials. Participants had varied number of years of experience working for their organizations and on the Navy-marine mammal issue specifically. Some participants had previously worked for another of the key organizations sampled, and in a few cases, on the Navy-marine mammal issue in both cases, so they were interviewed

regarding their experiences working from both perspectives. Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the final sample, which included 29 representatives across six organizations.

Analysis

The analysis across the three studies made use of a general two-step coding process that followed a version of Tracy's (2013) iterative analysis. The goal in all cases was to generate emergent themes from the data and I did this by first capturing the essence of participants' words through primary codes and then clustering these primary codes around emergent themes.

Table 1. *Demographic Summary for Dissertation Sample*

Organization	Recruited	Participated[a]	Response Rate[b]
Navy	22	7	30%
NGO community	24	11	48%
NOAA/NMFS	16	5	31%
Science community	10	3	30%
The Commission	7	3	43%
Coastal Commission	2	1	50%

a – Number of participants totals 30 in table because one representative was interviewed under their previous and current organizational affiliations
b – response rates rounded to nearest whole number

First, the data was analyzed in a data immersion phase, in which my focus was on getting a sense of possible interpretations of the data, and capturing what participants had been trying to convey to me in the interviews. I needed to take participants' words and phrases and pull back a step to consider what those words were trying to convey. For example, if a participant was telling me a story about another representative who she

observed to yell at a junior representative, I interpreted that as her describing bullying. Thus, through several rounds of primary coding, I was working through the data to capture the insight shared with me. The interviews totaled 36 hours and produced about 1000 pages of transcripts, so with all this data, it took several passes through in order to stay fresh and perceptive during coding. Throughout this process, a constant comparative method was used to ensure consistency in code definition (Charmaz, 2014).

During primary coding, I toggled between six distinct sets of data, one set of data grouping all representatives affiliated with a particular organization, To facilitate consistency, given the size and complexity of the data, I developed a codebook for listing codes, their definitions, and representative quotes which I found crucial to staying organized and efficient.

During secondary-cycle coding, I focused on seeing how the primary codes clustered around particular concepts or ideas. These concepts served as larger order themes in hierarchical coding (Tracy, 2013). To arise to the level of a theme, these emergent groupings needed to satisfy Owen's (1984) criteria for themes including repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness. Repetition referred to repeated use of the same concepts and words in primary codes. Recurrence referred to the repeated evoking of particular meanings. Finally, forcefulness in the context of this dissertation was interpreted as the strength of participants' opinions on a particular matter. Negative case analysis was used throughout the analysis stage in order to check interpretations of the data.

Organization of Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, each of the three studies that comprise this dissertation are presented. The first study examines the interactional challenges that representatives face in conversations on the Navy-marine mammal issue, in order to understand how they construct and manage difficult conversations. The second study digs deeper into the notion of difficult conversations by examining the emotional dynamics at play and the strategies for managing these. Lastly, the third study explores what challenges researchers face during the research process of trying to engage with representatives regarding their experiences in difficult conversations, and what strategies are used to manage them. Following the presentation of these three distinct studies, a discussion chapter offers overarching learnings from the dissertation and a proposed model for managing difficult conversations.

CHAPTER II

MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT

Overview

This chapter focuses on the interactional challenges associated with managing difficult conversations regarding complex environmental issues. This case study explores the interactional challenges that organizational representatives engaged during conversations regarding Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of key organizations involved in the Navy-marine mammal issue regarding their experiences in interorganizational conversations with other organizational representatives. The analysis suggests that relatively easier conversations among the representatives were marked by straightforward science exchanges and influenced by: (1) who is involved, (2) the goal of the conversation, and (3) the legitimacy of information discussed. Relatively more difficult conversations were marked by interpretation debates and influenced by: (1) different groups' use of science, (2) representatives' conflicting organizational perspectives, (3) the policy implications of interpretations, and (4) research funding sources. Building relationships enabled representatives to weather the difficult conversations that stemmed from interpretation debates. These findings yield several implications: the inherent emotionality associated with difficult conversations, the importance of building personalized relationships, and the importance of thinking systemically about relationships among representatives.

Introduction

Environmental issues tend to be rife with contention and are characterized by intense disagreements over the meaning of the environment for different stakeholder groups, which generates a high degree of sustained conflict (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). The environment means different things to various people and stakeholder groups, and those meanings translate into different interests when using its resources and developing environmental policy. Making decisions regarding the environment is often difficult as policy decisions often are unable to satisfy the interests of all stakeholders as decisions variously align with some stakeholder interests and clash with others given the complexity of the issue. Given the high stakes associated with crossing over these various sectors and levels of society, these conflicts tend to be defined by high public exposure, long lasting controversy, and political consequences (Sidaway, 2005).

Environmental conflicts emerge when there are fundamental differences between interests in the exploitation and conservation of increasingly sought after natural resources (Daniels & Walker, 2001; Emerson, Nabatchi, O'Leary, & Stephens, 2003). The differences exposed on these issues reflect the interests of diverse groups including public officials, corporate and industry interests, environmental groups, scientists and citizens (Cox, 2013; Daniels & Walker, 2001). Scholars have previously undertaken efforts to assess (Balint, Stewart, Desai, & Walters, 2011; Sidaway, 2005) and manage environmental conflicts (Cox, 2013; Daniels & Walker, 2001; Emerson et al., 2003). The result of environmental conflicts is that they compel diverse organizations to interact in order to address their often competing interests in the outcomes of environmental

decision-making processes (Cox, 2013). Various factors make conversations among these actors difficult, including the high stakes and uncertainty associated with the issues themselves (Stone, Patton, & Hess, 2010), a lack of scientific consensus among actors (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2012), and a lack of shared knowledge (Kinsella, 2004; 2002; McComas, 2003; Senecah, 2004).

The public participation literature has provided valuable insights into the interaction among actors involved in environmental conflicts and has focused on interactions that occur between decision makers and citizens in public settings. For example, this work has looked at public meeting design (McComas, 2001a; 2001b) and consensus building (Gwartney, Fessenden, & Landt, 2002). While it is important to understand the dynamics of public conversations among key stakeholders engaged with environmental conflict, the conversations among stakeholder groups when do not only occur in public settings. Rather, environmental conflicts also occur in public and private settings among representatives of various organizations.

However, the majority of public participation research on conversations associated with environmental conflicts tends to focus on the conduct and structure of public meetings which limit our understanding of the dynamics of those private or semi-private conversations which are crucial to moving the issues forward. Friedman (1994) suggests that conflict conversations look very different in public versus private settings, which highlights a need to examine the interactional challenges that are associated with less-public conversations among representatives of various stakeholder groups.

The present study is informed by the following research question, "What are the interactional challenges representatives encounter in inter-organizational conversations and the issues they pose and what strategies do representatives use to manage them?" My intent is to focus on the interactional challenges associated with interorganizational conversations in environmental conflict, in both public and private settings, in order to develop new practices for their management. I begin by reviewing the notion of environmental conflict and explore the factors that make these interorganizational conversations difficult. After describing the case used in this study, I then explain the methods I used to collect and analyze the data to explore the factors that promote relatively easier and difficult conversations among representatives on environmental issues.

Environmental Conflict and Interorganizational Difficult Conversations

Environmental conflicts expose the fundamental differences among competing actors with interests in environmental resources (Cox, 2013; Daniels & Walker, 2001; Emerson et al., 2003). The environmental issues at their core are complex because there is no single or straightforward way to balance their interests. For example in a contested planned offshore windfarm development, Rhode Island commercial fisheries may have an interest in limiting development of an offshore wind farm that falls within the rich waters where they find their catch while local public officials may wish to develop that technology in the same place to provide cheaper energy for residents (Nutters & Pinto da Silva, 2012). Given their competing interests in the management of environmental resources, various groups seek to influence environmental decision-making processes

and outcomes (Cox, 2013; Endres, 2009). Their competing interests in resources bring them together in conflicting ways during decision-making processes when they might not otherwise interact. Diverse actors become united by complex issues in environmental conflicts (Gray, 1985).

In order to understand the social construction of environmental conflicts, we need to examine the communicative practices of their actors. As Putnam (2013) argues, conflicts are constituted in communication, which means that we need to give attention to the way that interaction among actors creates, sustains, and modifies conflict. Environmental conflicts are at their heart about communication which highlights the significance of language and talk constitutes conflict among actors (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000).

Environmental conflict conversations are often difficult conversations. In their popular book, Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, Stone et al. (2010) define difficult conversations as emotionally-charged discussions that grapple with disagreement on what has or should happen regarding an issue and that directly affects actors' self-image and self-esteem. People engage in difficult conversations in all facets of life; whenever their differences make it hard to talk about something. Difficult conversations can occur in a variety of settings ranging from families (Keating, Russell, Cornacchione, & Smith, 2013), business environments (Knight, 2015), social work settings (Chapman, Hall, Colby, & Sisler, 2013), to public meetings (Beck, Littlefield, & Weber, 2012; Buttny, 2010; Tracy, 2007). Such high stakes conversations have also been called "crucial conversations" (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2011).

There are at least three important factors that contribute to the difficulty of conversations regarding environmental conflict. One factor leading to the difficulty of conversations in environmental conflicts is the high scientific uncertainty surrounding complex environmental issues. Stone et al. (2010) point to the importance of uncertainty when they argue that difficult conversations occur "when the issues at stake are important and the outcome uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about the people with whom we are discussing it, there is potential for us to experience the conversation as difficult" (p. xxvii).

In the context of environmental conflict, this uncertainty refers to scientific uncertainty regarding the environmental impacts of human activity. Decision makers turn to science to provide clarity on the environmental impacts of proposed actions, in order to point the way forward and justify their decisions (Ozawa, 1996; Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). However scientific evidence often does not point a clear path forward as the impact of human activity on the environment is often not fully understood at the time that decisions need to be made. This scientific uncertainty may be due to limited data on the subject or because environmental impacts are difficult to study; for example studying deep-diving whales is difficult given the complexities associated with observing these animals at great depths (Board, 2005). As a result, decision makers often must make decisions on issues amid high levels of scientific uncertainty (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Actors involved in these issues may fear negative consequences from their decisions and thus, difficult conversations among them ensue as

they grapple with the long-term implications of decisions made amid scientific uncertainty (Keating et al., 2013).

A second factor leading to the difficulty of conversations in environmental conflicts is the lack of scientific consensus surrounding complex issues (Sarewitz, 2004). Peterson and Feldpausch-Parker (2012) note that, "science often is portrayed as the neutral authority within the political fray" (p. 519). However in reality, people arrive at different understandings of the science and use science to influence decision outcomes that serve their interests (Ozawa, 1996). For example, Mansfield and Hass (2006) documented how different groups' framing of scientific uncertainties regarding endangered Alaskan Stellar sea lions acted as a political strategy. This shows how actors with competing interests may support their positions with competing scientific results, enabled by uncertainties that lend to numerous ways to understand environmental risks and impacts (Sarewitz, 2004). Given the social, economic and political impacts often associated with environmental decisions, some may also push for urgency in decision-making processes when it serves their interests (Crick & Gabriel, 2010). While positions continue to be justified by competing scientific conclusions or invoked scientific uncertainty, the gridlock surrounding these issues grows (Sarewitz, 2004).

A third factor that can make environmental conversations difficult is the lack of shared knowledge regarding these complex issues as suggested by the public participation literature on environmental decision-making (Cox, 2013; Depoe, Delicath & Elsenbeer, 2004; Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Technocratic models of public participation create a distinction between publics as having lay knowledge and

experts as possessing the privileged forms of scientific and technical knowledge (Cox, 2013; Endres, 2009; Kinsella, 2004; 2002; McComas, 2003; Senecah, 2004). Public expertise is dismissed as uninformed and too non-technical to be considered by decision-makers (Dietz, Stern, & Rycroft, 1989). Lay knowledge may include localized knowledge of the issues, rely on anecdotes or observation, or be based on emotional concerns and fears (Fischer, 2000). Previous research has examined such "irrational" concerns in environmental conflict stemming from emotional sensitivity due to place attachment (Cass & Walker, 2009; Manzo, 2003), value differences (Vining & Tyler, 1999) and place identity (O'Brien, 2006). Given that public participation involves an "expert versus lay" knowledge divide, laypersons seek to gain legitimacy by resorting to "public scientific arguments" (Endres, 2009).

Difficult conversations regarding the environment often occur in the interorganizational domain as representatives from various organizations talk about how their respective groups may work through and resolve their conflicts. Generally speaking, the people involved in the problem domains associated with environmental conflict may be any assortment of individual, group or organizational actors (Gray, 1985). However, a closer look into the specific problem domains occupied by environmental conflicts reveals that these actors are predominantly organizations that may include government agencies, environmental interest groups and corporations (Cox, 2013; Sidaway, 2005).

Organizational members that engage with environmental conflict represent the organization's interests as part of their job and engage in interorganizational

conversations. The aforementioned factors suggest that organizational representatives involved in environmental conflict are likely to engage in difficult conversations when interacting with other organizational representatives as they promote their organization's interests on environmental issues. These difficult interorganizational conversations are the observable interactions among representatives through which "organizational differences are aired" (Bennington, Shelter, & Shaw, 2003, p. 118)

Interorganizational conversations among representatives involved in environmental conflicts do not only take place in public settings. They also occur in pre-decisional, informal, science review, sidebar, conference and settlement negotiation meetings that take place beyond the public's view. Studying interorganizational conversations connects to Friedman's (1994) previous work examining labor negotiations where he argues that conflict among parties can only be understood by examining how representatives communicate in public as well as how they communicate behind closed doors. When interacting in the public's view, representatives from competing sides enact particular communicative practices in which they perform their role as tough negotiators taking a hard stance to promote their organization's interests. Their interaction in private is often less adversarial, as representatives often feel able to explore the possibility of compromise or collaborative solutions without needing to keep up the tough negotiator façade.

As a result, conceiving of representative's interaction solely as public participation may not be telling us the full story of how organizational representatives manage their differences on complex issues when interacting with one another (Endres,

2009). Private and semi-private settings are also important conversation sites for organizational representatives' work on complex environmental issues. Yet, we know relatively little about the conversational dynamics in those settings. Extending Friedman's (1994) argument on labor negotiations to environmental conflicts suggests that in order to understand the interaction among diverse organizations and organizational representatives, we need to explore their conversations both behind and in front of closed doors. This study contributes to previous communication research by examining what organizational representatives conceive of as difficult conversations pertaining to the Navy-marine mammal issue. To that end, I pose the following research question: "What are the interactional challenges representatives encounter in inter-organizational conversations and the issues they pose and what strategies do representatives use to manage them?"

Methods

My research question regarding interactional challenges in interorganizational conversations was investigated through qualitative interviews of organizational representatives involved in an ongoing controversy regarding Navy training activities and their potential impact on marine mammals. These representatives talked about their experiences in relatively easier and difficult conversations with those outside their organization, during the course of their work addressing the issue.

The Navy-Marine Mammal Issue

Controversy surrounds U.S. Navy training activities. Navy training activities such as sonar use and underwater detonations are used to keep the military prepared,

however these activities have been implicated in the death or significant trauma of marine mammals (Balcomb & Claridge, 2001; Evan & Englander, 2001). There has been a range of studies conducted with different determinations regarding a connection between training activities and significant harm to marine mammals and if so, what those linking mechanisms might be (DeReuiter et al., 2013; Evans & England, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2005; Jepson et al., 2003; Tyack et al., 2011). The possible linkage between Navy training activities and marine mammal well-being is particularly alarming given that marine mammals are protected under several major environmental laws (Zirbel et al., 2011) and have particularly high public appeal given their charismatic behavior.

The Navy-marine mammal issue has brought together representatives of organizations with diverse positions to find ways to manage this complex issue. At the federal level, the Navy is the action agency conducting training exercises while the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the regulatory agency charged with regulating such federal actions per environmental laws. It should be noted that NMFS is distinct from its parent agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), however the two are regarded as representing a united interest, among the key representatives in the Navy-marine mammal issue. For the purposes of this study I will refer to all NOAA and NMFS representatives with a NOAA/NMFS affiliation for brevity purposes. The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission) is an independent government agency with oversight of federal actions that may impact marine mammal conservation efforts. A number of environmental non-government organizations (NGOs)

have taken an interest in the issue driven by marine mammal conversation concerns. The California Coastal Commission (the Coastal Commission) provides state oversight of federal agency actions in state waters, and has been active on the issue pertaining to training activities off the coast of California, which is also the habitat for a number of marine mammal species. Finally, the scientist community includes experts in marine mammal biology and bioacoustics who have academic, research institution or consulting affiliations.

Given the high conflict potential associated with interaction among the groups of representatives, I was interested in the conversations taking place among representatives regarding the issue and to learn what poses as interactional challenges to these representatives. Initially, I conceived of a public-private duality regarding the settings in which to examine representatives' conversations as informing this study. However, very early into the research process, key informants told me that meaningful conversations among the representatives that moved the issue forward, were taking place in private and that public meetings would tell me little about how they actually worked together. This led me to change the approach of this study to where I emphasized understanding the dynamics of their private conversations rather than comparing the challenges they faced across private and public settings.

Data and Participants

The data used in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews (Tracy, 2013). The use of interviews enabled me to move beyond outsider or public accounts of the conversations occurring on the Navy-marine mammal issue to insider perspectives of

involved representatives. The sampling strategy used in this study was aimed at capturing the network of representatives working on this issue. I initially identified potential participants through purposeful sampling and then broadened the list of those solicited using snowball sampling. My initial sample included existing contacts stemming from previous research efforts (for example, Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010). I also generated a list of potential participants from a variety of publically available documents pertaining to the issue including attendance lists for dialogue and science workshops, War of the Whales (Horwitz, 2014), press releases and news articles, and legal documents from past/current litigation. I based my inclusion of a particular organization on the organizations represented in these documents. In order to broaden my solicitation to other relevant representatives in the network, I asked all participants for suggested contacts and then contacted those individuals as well. I checked my understanding of the key organizations involved in the issue with participants to ensure I was soliciting participants within all of them. As a final check that I was soliciting all relevant representatives, I announced my study in two popular research listservs relevant to the issue.

Participants were emailed an introduction to the study which included an information sheet and invitation to participate in an interview. The information sheet indicated an assurance of confidentiality and my request to record interviews. The interview guide was furnished in advance upon request. In all, eighty-three representatives were recruited across six key organizations identified through the sampling strategy. Two of those eighty-three recruited were representatives of the

Department of Justice who I contacted when participants suggested it was a key organization on the issue. However neither responded so this organizational affiliation was not represented in the study and has not been reported further. Table 2 reports the organizational affiliation information for the final sample which consisted of 29 representatives, a 35% response rate. This response rate reflects: (1) my efforts to solicit from anyone who may be or have been involved with the issue, even though a key informant who had research and professional experience related to the issue suggested to me there were only about 30-40 total representatives currently involved, and (2) a high number of individuals currently involved who declined participation due to legal concerns. All participants met the following criteria: (a) organizational affiliation with a key organization involved in the issue, and (b) prior/current experience interacting with representatives of other key organizations involved in the issue.

Table 2. *Demographic Summary for Study 1 Sample*

Organization	Recruited	Participated[a]	Response Rate[b]
Navy	22	7	30%
NGO community	24	11	48%
NOAA/NMFS	16	5	31%
Science community	10	3	30%
The Commission	7	3	43%
Coastal Commission	2	1	50%

a – Number of participants totals 30 in table because one representative was interviewed under their previous and current organizational affiliations
b – response rates rounded to nearest whole number

Interviews were conducted June to October 2015 either in person or over the phone and lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. During the interview, participants were

asked to describe their experiences in conversations with other representatives on the Navy-marine mammal issue. They were also asked to identify and describe challenging and relatively easier moments in these conversations. Finally, participants were asked to describe their feelings during these moments and reflect on their struggle or success with managing their feelings; however the results of this interview data is reported in a separate study. I requested follow up interviews with any participant with whom I ran out of time. In all, the interviews totaled about 36 hours and 1000 transcribed pages.

Analysis

In order to make sense of the data, a two-stage analysis process was used where I: (1) identified reported challenges specific to each organizational affiliation, and then (2) identified crosscutting groupings in the sample. The interview data from representatives of each organizational affiliation were treated as a separate set of data in this stage. First, to identify the challenges reported within each data set, a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted, following a version of Tracy's (2013) iterative analysis. Transcripts were initially read multiple times and coded to gain a sense of the various possible interpretations that could emerge. Lindlof and Taylor's (2011) process was used to generate primary codes from these initial codes. Primary codes were developed to capture the essence of representatives' perceptions of the challenges they encountered in inter-organizational conversations. A codebook listing codes, their definitions, and representative quotes was created to facilitate data analysis. A constant comparative method was be used to ensure consistency in code definition

(Charmaz, 2014) which meant that I was going back and forth to reconsider initial codes and primary codes.

During secondary-cycle coding, I grouped the primary codes into broader emergent themes, a process called hierarchical coding (Tracy, 2013). The themes in each data set referred to interactional challenges in conversations reported by representatives of particular organizational affiliation. To arise to the level of a theme, I used Owen's (1984) criteria of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness; the latter interpreted for this study as the strength of participants' opinions on a particular matter. For example, there were several instances in which a theme emerged from only a few participants' responses but their opinions on the matter were so strong that they needed to be highlighted as a theme in the data. Negative case analysis was used in order to check interpretations of themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). From this first stage of the analysis, 30 initial themes across the six sets of data emerged. I then conducted a secondary analysis of the initial themes. I again used Owen's (1984) criteria to identify crosscutting themes. These emergent themes referred to contextual factors which reflect representatives' varied orientations during conversations and shaped their interaction.

Results

My analysis suggests that how representatives talked about scientific information played a key role in the kinds of conversations they experienced. Overall, these results suggest that a focus on scientific knowledge drives representatives' conversations (Depoe & Delicath, 2004; Depoe et al., 2004; Endres, 2009). The importance of providing a scientific basis for one's positions in these conversations serves to separate

fact from opinion and was described by a Navy representative as the difference between "some people that did their homework and some people that didn't." The data suggests two ways that representatives orient themselves to the role of science in conversations as: (1) information exchanges, and (2) debated interpretations.

Informational exchanges are considered relatively easy conversations to engage in. Where easier conversations begin to break down is when representatives start to interpret science. Interpretation debates are considered relatively difficult conversations to have. In the following analysis, I present the various factors identified in the data as prompting these relatively easier and more difficult conversations.

Informational Exchanges

In relatively easier conversations, representatives emphasize the exchange of scientific information. The focus is on the state of the science relevant to the Navy-marine mammal issue. In these conversations, representatives share information regarding the latest research being conducted on scientific topics including marine mammal biology and acoustics. There are several factors that make these easier conversations possible: (1) who is involved, (2) the goal of the conversation, and (3) the legitimacy of information discussed.

Who is involved. Easier conversations are those that involve representatives with technical expertise or an interest in learning the science behind the issue. These conversations may involve "just science guys doing science stuff" such as discussions among scientists in sidebar conversations at conferences. Or they may involve non-scientists such as attorneys who have acquired technical expertise on the issue.

Representatives' understanding of the issue lends to others' perception of their competency. Science is discussed to clarify the current extent of knowledge on the issue as well as to identify gaps in the literature that need to be filled. Easier conversations are those where representatives share a science orientation that guides them to focus on "rational arguments" rather than a "we love the whales" orientation. Such discussions positively engage representatives with science-oriented personalities that enjoy talking about science.

Conversation goal. Another factor making these conversations easy is that the goal is for representatives to learn. As learning conversations, the focus is on sharing information and transferring knowledge to gain a better understanding. Learning conversations can occur between scientists and other non-technical representatives. Here, scientists are providing data to representatives, which they in turn use to become informed on the topics they are dealing with.

One important use of this information is to stay up to date on the science behind the issue, so that representatives would be current in their understanding of the issue. Representatives described their learning conversations with scientists as a valuable resource to their work given the importance of staying abreast of the current research. For example, a Coastal Commission representative described how these learning conversations keep them informed of the latest science: "we talk to a whole variety of people getting that research done and try to figure out because we keep learning over time what the effect that we didn't know five years earlier or something so we follow

research, we talk to the other experts, we try to find out what the most appropriate technology is and then try to apply it."

In these conversations, representatives expressed the absence of any agenda other than to learn from subject matter experts. In this way, learning conversations were characterized as straightforward open exchanges of information. Representatives seeking to learn the science met with scientists at site visits to scientists' labs, conferences or briefings in meetings. As an example of representatives' general receptivity to their learning conversations with scientists, one Navy representative characterized her experience in one-on-one "amazing briefings" with a scientist.

Learning conversations can also occur among all representatives. One way that learning is facilitated is by representatives providing the information underlying their positions on the issue, as this Commission representative explained: "I mean those [conversations] are easier just because for the most part, it's answering questions about something I've written. And so that is very easy for me to explain and not get as frustrated about…" Another way that learning is facilitated is by approaching conversations with those who have different views from them with a learning orientation and an aim toward gaining an understanding of where the other side is coming from. An NGO representative described how his aim to learn led him to use a non-argumentative communication style in conversations: "If I find a logical point, they apply science or data or whatever or a simple question to ask them that I might relate to what they perceive, fine, I'll ask them, but I'm not trying to win an argument in a conversation. I'm trying to learn."

In learning conversations, Navy representatives consider it an opportunity to gather information from the public as well. They talked about such conversations taking place in forums such as public meetings. At public meetings, they considered these a chance to be informed on science they did not find in their analysis. In some cases, the public would identify information they had missed. These conversations were in fact easier in the respect that representatives found the provided information they learned about helpful to their work.

Information legitimacy. A third factor enabling easier conversations was a shared legitimization of scientific information among the groups. Science was regarded as the legitimate basis for discussions by representatives of all groups and it was this shared belief of its authority that made conversations easy. Because science was a legitimate type of information, using it to support one's position lent credibility to the representative. A Coastal Commission representative described being able to convince others on the basis of backing up their position with science: "We're bringing in the latest research and the idea is that we are so compelling in our wisdom that we either convince [others] that this is a good idea." When one has "science on your side," the conversations become easier because representatives was considered by others to move from realm of opinion to "fact" when it was supported by legitimate scientific information rather than non-authoritative emotional concerns.

The legitimization of science served to support the use of what I call "science talk" as a language of authority spoken in conversations. If you could talk science, you derived some authority from using this language and this made conversations easier for

representatives because they were taken more seriously. A Navy representative described the usefulness of science talk in conversations as: "You could use that scientific information in other conversations, both with professionals and with people who just think the Navy is trying to kill marine mammals. And you could say, "Well, there is a lot more to it." And it was imperative that I understood that stuff in all those conversations." A NOAA/NMFS representative drew on science talk to legitimize and thus ease conversations regarding regulation decisions: "I feel as though our entire thing is to entirely objectively locate every single piece of information related to the operational needs and the science of the marine mammals and put them in a context of what our regulations require and then come out the end with the right answer."

Those who did not speak science talk still perceived it as legitimate as evidenced in their attempts to learn the science. A scientist describes such an attempt in the following excerpt:

> There were people who had environmentally concerns…that were saying, like myself, that's a bad idea about sonafying the entire ocean. That being said most of them did not have the lexicon to understand how to talk about it. So when they would go out and make public pleas to stop it, they were saying things like, "it's as loud as a Saturn rocket" or other equally uninformed…So they were kind of similarly dismissed because they didn't have the language to talk about it. So I saw initially what my strong seat was [as a scientist] is I could go in and clarify what is a decibel, what's an acoustic watt, what are they talking about here. And

> there were not a lot of terms being used back then that were well settled in the literature…unless we have clear lexicon, we're not going to have clear conversations.

Representatives also brought on experts who spoke the language of science talk fluently. Having scientific experts to support your side lent credibility to your position on the issue because great respect was paid to this knowledge. For example a Navy representative spoke regarding NGOs: "I mean, we may not agree with their science, but some of their scientists are well-respected scientists." Having scientists on your side differentiated you from others who did not, and this distinction was drawn by representatives of several groups describing the varied influence of organizations within the NGO community. A Commission representative described this distinction as the difference between good and bad translators of science. Having the credibility of science on your side was sought out by representatives in order to be part of easier conversations that were considered objective, "point-counter point" productive discussions. Easier conversations then were those in which representatives felt they could manage these back and forth exchange of scientific knowledge.

Interpretation Debates

A move that breaks down conversations and makes them difficult is when science begins to be used for interpretation. In relatively difficult conversations, representatives grapple with scientific interpretations stemming from high uncertainty surrounding the issue. Uncertainties allow for different interpretations of the risk

associated with an issue (Spruijt et al., 2014). A scientist explained this uncertainty as stemming from limited amount of information and the issue's complexity. The nature of training activities themselves were straightforward, rather it was determining their impact on marine mammals that was complex. Conversations are relatively difficult when they involve representatives debating interpretations of the science. In these conversations, the focus shifts from what scientific evidence exists, to how to interpret the conclusions of that evidence in light of larger considerations. When a focus on interpretation takes over, representatives become focused on the ends to which those interpretations support. Those ends often compete given the groups' varied interests in the issued. There are several factors leading representatives to debate interpretations: (1) different groups' use of science, (2) representatives' conflicting organizational perspectives, (3) the policy implications of interpretations, and (4) research funding sources.

Whose facts count. Difficult conversations are those where the goals and aims of the various groups lead them to pay attention to some data and ignore others. The issue here is that representatives use science differently and so whose facts count when interpreting science becomes a source of difficulty. Different interpretations of the scientific uncertainties pertaining to the issue have resulted in different assessments of risk associated with Navy training activities. One way in which interpretations diverged is when they supported what were perceived as objective and rational versus emotional concerns on the issue. Rational concerns addressed questions of science while emotional concerns addressed issues deemed irrelevant to reaching objective decisions.

One contested concern was animal welfare; should this be a matter of concern in a scientific discussion? Should the ethical implications of animal welfare concerns be considered alongside scientific knowledge? Navy representatives considered scientific data to be the relevant backbone of decisions. Through their interpretations of the science, they sought to support the rationale behind their decisions. They pushed for the focus on the science and perceived conversations to become difficult to manage when others pushed the conversation to talk more about animal welfare.

For example, one Navy representative recalled a controversy that erupted in a multi-stakeholder meeting that brought the key organizations together, wherein the participants were charged by Congress with writing up a state of the science report on the issue. The controversy stemmed from whether a chapter on animal welfare should be included in the report. She described her organization's view that it was not relevant to a science report but that this clashed with the NGO community's expressed desire to include it as relevant information. In this example, the NGOs perceive animal welfare to be relevant to understanding the science behind the issue while the Navy representatives saw those as two separate issues.

Emotional concerns posed difficulty in conversations because representatives viewed their usefulness differently. Some felt they were important indicators of an issues importance. For example, NGOs looked to the public to relay some of these non-scientific concerns because "most of the decisions tend to be political at bottom…so the public is a key player in any political decision…politicians and government officials need to hear from the public in order to get their attention in most cases." Others did not

consider these concerns authoritative, working to reestablish a scientific authority in them. A Navy representative described this difficulty: “If someone makes the emotional decision on an issue then that's hardest – it is the hardest to get them to see beyond that equation of emotion… [public meetings are an] opportunity to trying to set them what the facts are. I mean the science behind the analysis of it, why we basically do, serves to you as fact.” Another Navy representative echoed this difficulty: “We're trying to talk about science, it would end up coming back with position statements of the harm to the animals and they can’t possibly let us continue blah, blah, blah.” A NOAA/NMFS representative stressed the importance of examining the science behind the issue, and making decisions based on the science.

A Commission representative explained his view of the Navy and NGOs as extremes on this spectrum: “I think [the Navy] would pick a no action alternative that more or less really…was to continue on as we are at this point. I don’t think they did a great job often of analyzing their impacts...And then, and very predictably, the other side would over-interpret.” NGO representatives did not perceive themselves as over-interpreting, but rather pushing the Navy beyond talking about the “good stuff” regarding their mission and compliance with regulations to consider issues of animal welfare that were not talked about. Such issues were not perceived to be part of Navy’s conversational goals and yet when they weren’t addressed, the Navy was viewed as “sticking to the party line and not really willing to engage.”

Scientists occupied a unique space in interpretation debates because they considered themselves to be impartial investigators seeking answers, not interpreting

their meaning for policy decisions. And yet, they felt their facts should count in the decision-making process. Here they perceived difficult conversations when trying to get decision makers to reflect their concerns in decisions: "We go over the same information over and over again, and nothing changes…how many times over and over again we say, 'You have got to do something to try to analyze and quantify cumulative impacts.' But, repeatedly all we get is, a paragraph about how important they are, cumulative impacts, but nothing quantifiable." They perceived difficulty to lie with entities "pretrial vested interest" in decision outcomes and "cherry-picking" the data used in interpretations to support organizational interests.

Scientists perceived their role in the middle to be problematic also because it could interfere with the organizational goals of others who seek the legitimacy of their expertise. A scientist explained his difficult stance in conversations: "Science tells us that…there are some things we really need to be concerned about…and there are some reasons science is saying that on a few of these things, it's not as bad as we thought it was initially. It's hard to say that because each one of those two things pisses off a different set of people."

NOAA/NMFS representatives perceived themselves also in the middle, having the task of balancing training activities with marine mammal protection, through regulations that comport with the law. As a result, they needed to strike a balance that at times conflicted with other's interpretations of the data: "We have a law. NGOs want protection and would wish that the Navy wasn't out there doing anything. The Navy wants to do all they want to do…their mission of military readiness is the primary

mission. We're in the center of that, trying to make sure that whatever we ask people to do and allow comports with the law. Certainly clearly those are the more difficult conversations." NOAA/NMFS sought justification of their decisions from science in order to uphold their public record as objective-based decision makers.

Navy representatives described their use of science to bolster the rationale behind their decisions as well. Reaching the best decisions meant incorporating the best science and ensuring that decisions were not made from emotions but rather the "facts." Scientific evidence was used as "facts" supporting their impact assessments and decisions. When Navy representatives encountered others who they perceived to be misinformed or who had misinterpreted the science, their challenge was to "reconcile the facts." Conversations offered the Navy this opportunity.

In conversations, NGO representatives attempted to insert their own scientific expertise through "public scientific arguments" (Endres, 2009). They sought to challenge the Navy's assessment of risk and impact to marine mammals through their own interpretations of the science. They perceived difficulty in attaining influence through such science talk. One NGO representative explained his organization's numerous attempts to engage with the Navy in conversations about their divergent interpretations of the science. He characterized these attempts as having gone nowhere and pointed out their inability to engage on interpretations as the impetus for filing lawsuits against the Navy.

In seeking to force the influence of their concerns, NGOs described how they challenged agency decisions in court. Lawsuits were considered to provide influence for

those who don't think their facts count. So they become an alternative forum in which the organizations engage and they are the site at which interpretations are debated when these debates cannot be contained within conversations. NGO participants explained that agencies do not respond to their concerns or address their requests for conversation in meaningful ways. It is perceived that agencies do not think they need to answer to NGOs request for information or concerns. When NGOs could not find meaningful conversations within formally mandated or informal settings, they "turned up the heat on agencies" by submitting their comments through the public comment process. This put their concern on record, key to gaining influence through the courts. Although lawsuits were felt to be a last resort strategy, NGO participants found them necessary to compel agencies to take their concerns seriously.

NGOs described their use of litigation to move past the Navy's "dog and pony shows" that provided "lip service" but not information they found meaningful to demonstrating the Navy's acknowledgment of their concerns. They expected the Navy to take seriously the laws that required federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their activities and to engage with and incorporate stakeholder concerns in their decisions. Their goal with litigation was to force the Navy to take their facts into account when this did not happen in conversations.

They perceived difficulty with NOAA/NMFS as well whose representatives they felt had at times provided weak justifications for their interpretations of the science. Again, they sought help from the courts to force the agency to reconsider their use of science, as this NGO representative explained: "Even when you know that you're right

and you know that the regulatory agency knows that you're right, that they don't actually tap down that information because they're cowards and they came up with some ridiculous justification which hopefully, sometimes court, recognized for being the hokum that they are." On establishing this legal basis, an NGO representative explained: "If we do get into a litigation context, I need to have expertise to try and present information to convince the court that what I'm trying to accomplish, it is in the public interest and it is well supported in the science."

Further complicating conversations, representatives' efforts to preserve future legal standing on the issue appeared to take priority in some conversations, rather than on what was being said among them in the moment. Conversations are not considered stand-alone opportunities to debate the issue; they occur in a string of interactions. Representatives were oriented to think about what came after each conversation. For example, NGO representatives considered what would happen after conversations with the Navy in which they did not feel their concerns were addressed. The afterlife of these conversations was often considered to be lawsuits. This led some NGOs to describe their unwillingness to engage in arguments with the Navy over their interpretations and decisions in favor of seeking an audience for their concerns with the court instead. So conversations became ritualistic, in that representatives went through the motions but meaningful conversations were not achieved (McComas, Besley, & Black, 2010).

Organizational socialization. Another factor leading to interpretation debates is the conflicting ways in which representatives are socialized into their respective organizations. Organizational socialization is the process by which members "learn the

ropes" at work and discover what is valued and devalued by the organization (Schein, 1988; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The Navy-marine mammal issue involves organizations that socialize representatives to emphasize different values and work processes in their job. Representatives participate in these conversations due to their affiliation with a key organization involved in the issue (Brummel, Nelson, Souter, Jakes, & Williams, 2012). When representatives came into conversations with other organizational representatives, they were still on the job but the workplace setting was no longer homogenous in value and process, it was a diverse setting that blended representatives who worked differently. Representatives were still cognizant of their organization's interests in these interorganizational settings. For example, a Commission representative remained committed to the needs of her organization and how her conversations with others might impact its interests, explaining: "The Commission's reputation is a very important. And so I want to make sure that the conversations that I have with NGOs are not going to be taken out of context."

Different work backgrounds were considered to lend to competing worldviews among the representatives. Differences due to organizational affiliations posed difficulties to conversations particularly as representatives needed to navigate the Navy's communication formalities and norms. The Navy representatives had been socialized to work within a hierarchy, focus on technical and objective information, and restrict their communication to that which their specific role allowed. Thus, it was difficult for them to engage in conversations where NGO representatives wanted to discuss information they deemed subjective and emotionally-biased or which they were not at liberty to

discuss. In these cases, they were challenged by what they considered misinterpretations of the science or strong beliefs based more on environmental agendas rather than the science.

NGO representatives had been socialized in their organizations to seek information, value issues affecting animal welfare, measure policy decisions against environmental laws aimed at protecting species, and carry on more open conversations. The Navy's interest in maintaining conversations along the line of science was seen as dismissive by NGO representatives who wanted to engage them in these matters, as is demonstrated in this excerpt from an NGO representative:

> [The Navy representatives] were saying [the training activity] isn't going to harm [the whales] for these various reasons and I was trying to engage with them about you know well, that's not true if you look at the science and the definition of harm under the Endangered Species Act and how does this really comport with what we have just said about right whales that it just would take you know removal of one adult or even one juvenile whale could jeopardize the continued existence, you know how does all this comport and you know they were just kind of sticking to the party line and not really willing to engage with me about any of the possibilities…

The Coastal Commission representative also described difficulty when confronted with Navy formalities and communication norms. This individual had been

socialized in their organization to develop transparent open communication with stakeholders to explain the rationale behind the agency's decisions. The representative had found the hierarchical communication style of the Navy difficult to navigate around when seeking such rationale behind their decisions. In describing these "non-conversations," the representative explained that they didn't involve the right people who could explain the rationale.

Scientists were socialized to esteem rational objective knowledge and limit bias from emotional information. Given how they had been socialized into their line of work, scientists felt comfortable sharing information, discussing the limits of knowledge on a particular topic, and pursuing collaborative efforts. In debating scientific interpretations, they ran up against difficulty when trying to engage Navy representatives who had been socialized into adhering to policies, acting within the insular organization, and being wary of sharing information unless specifically allowed. Scientists were comfortable adapting their conclusions in light of new information but they experienced difficult conversations with the Navy who they considered to take much longer for this new information to move through and be accepted by representatives along the chain of command.

They expressed understanding as to why acceptance might take longer given that a particular proposed methodology for example might never have been done before. However, they perceived such quick decisions to be scary for Navy representatives who were more used to weighing the options and details of decisions and in an urgent matter, would need to trust outside expertise on what to do. One scientist perceived suspicion

among Navy representatives of outsiders due to that organization's insularity. One way to read this perceived insularity is that it stems from the Navy's mission as a defense agency to protect information and so representatives would have been socialized into this penchant for secrecy and independence. Further complicating such conversations is that they needed to take place at multiple levels in the organization, up through the hierarchy of representatives in charge of making such decisions. Thus the parties had different socialized expectations of the time taken to respond to urgent matters.

Policy implications. The policy implications of how science is interpreted and the high stakes associated with this issue also make these conversations difficult. One scientist representative indicated the Navy-marine mammal issue was a billion dollar issue given its impact on Navy training and because it had implications for oil and gas exploration due to its connection to controversial seismic air gun activities. An NGO representative visualized the high stakes involved because of the public interest in whales and national security.

Despite the research that has been conducted on the issue, uncertainty remains regarding the impact of training activities on marine mammals. The uncertainty surrounding interpretations regarding impact of training activities was difficult to manage in conversations because it had larger policy implications. Thus, scientific interpretations were considered political. Here's how a Navy representative described the politics involved: "We'd get into these arguments and the scientists would just sort of go, "Can we just talk about the science?" And you couldn't even have a rational conversation of the science. Because the science got really political, which was very

unfortunate." Adds a Commission representative, "When you're in the Beltway, it's based on politics versus other things."

One particularly obvious incongruence among organizational interpretations revolved around how decisions should be made given the scientific uncertainty on the issue. This challenge refers to interpreting science, and "deploying" it into policy decisions through what is known as the precautionary principle. This principle states that when actions pose a plausible risk, as Navy training activities have been characterized to do to marine mammals, for which there is no scientific consensus, then there is a responsibility to interpret data on the side of caution and take steps to minimize potential risks (Kriebel, 2001). As a Commission representative described it, the policy implications of these interpretations fueled difficult conversations because some representatives would adopt the language of protection in the face of the unknown while others would speak a language of action in the face of the knowns.

For example, representatives debated the degree to which science should be interpreted as calling for protection or regulation. Differences among them stemmed from their level of comfort with uncertainty. The Navy was highlighted in this respect as being uncomfortable with uncertainty and seeking only that which for which they had a strong scientific basis. One Navy representative expressed the difference between the known and unknown here: "[An NGO representative] had written an article about marine mammals or a publication about the sonar issue. I think I counted all the might's and mays and it was overwhelming, it was nothing based on fact." A Coastal Commission representative explained how he differed from the Navy in his application

of the precautionary principle to decisions: “The Navy likes to have certainty and science that establishes something beyond the shadow of a doubt. That's where we, I think, get into different mind sets about looking at things. We're trying to figure out what to do about all the things that we don't know and they're trying to apply what we do know.”

NGO representatives often cited the need for a moderate rather than extreme view on curbing Navy training activities to protect marine mammals. Some cited that an acceptable reason for the disturbance of marine mammals was to conduct research to better understand them. This was an acceptable tradeoff given what they felt was a more realistic approach to balancing precaution with action. Some NGOs did not agree with this moderate approach, as recalled by a Navy representative, who experienced a difficult “loop de loop” conversation: “Okay, here’s how we need to do to Science.” “Well, you can’t do that because you’re going to hurt the animal.” “Well do you want to get to the bottom of this or not? Do you want to know the reality of this or do you just see it as a public affairs issue?” The representative felt this exchange went around in circles because the Navy was being criticized for not studying their impacts on marine mammals and for disturbing marine mammals in their attempt to do so. The precautionary principle led some of those with conservation goals to fear “under protection error” while yet facing push back from the Navy who did not want to be over-regulated. In both cases, interpretations had implications for future policies that impacted the organizations’ goals.

Another way in which policy implications drove the interpretation debate was that some representatives spoke of their varying responsibilities to engage with policy outcomes. Scientists were considered to be insulated from those outcomes in that their focus was on the science itself and not the implications of interpretations on the kinds of policies pursued. I use the term afterlife to capture this. Several scientists noted their focus was on generating the information and providing it to decision makers; they didn't feel responsible if others interpreted that data inappropriately. This was concerning to others, such as this NGO representative who felt scientists needed to be more cognizant of their afterlife of their words in conversations: "[Scientists] come into the policy arena and actually cause trouble because they think, I'm going to give you the correct information and you will do the right thing. Now if all it took was the right, the facts, for policy to do the right thing, we'd live in heaven. And we don't…So politicians don't give a crap about the truth. They don't give a crap about facts."

Representatives considered the afterlife of scientific interpretations in connection with the public context of certain difficult conversations. Putting interpretation to policy on the public record meant that the afterlife of interpretations was longer as there was now a record that attached an individual's name to recommendations. This excerpt demonstrates a NOAA/NMFS representative's concern for the afterlife of interpretations-turned-decisions that are publically recorded:

> Difficult conversations revolve around mitigation and the desire of other people for us to make the Navy or whoever do things. Sometimes it's things that are

> within our power. But we have a record and we firmly believe that it's not the right thing to do and we balance it as the law says against the parts for the navy if we don't think it's the right thing to do. Sometimes we actually disagree with what people are suggesting, based on scientific reasons or sometimes people actually suggesting that we were outside of our authority. But either way we're always arguing with somebody and having to defend in our public record why we did what we did. Nothing is ever a "yes or no," we have to have a well-reasoned written record of why we do …But we're always under staffed and so we're always rushing and there's time for things to slip through the cracks and the minute that it does, we don't have an defensible record, or heaven forbid, something worse, we make a mistake that somehow badly affects the resource.

An NGO representative also weighed in on the perceived pressure to be careful with the policy implications of science interpretations, noting that in public settings like a public meeting, people speak very slowly because they choose their words carefully. In these interpretation debates, the challenge was to make your point while also being diplomatic:

> It's going to be on record. They do not want to say anything that might come back to bite them in the ass. Very, very careful how they say it so that it's both professional and diplomatic and there's no commitment to something they don't

want to be committed to against the point they're trying to get across, it's a difficult balancing act.

Funding questions. Another source of debate on science interpretations stemmed from the sources of funding behind the research conducted. Numerous representatives noted the Navy's prominence as the leading funder of marine mammal research. One NGO representative estimated they funded around 80% of the research being conducted. Debate among representatives regarding the appropriateness of Navy funding and its relationship to science interpretations, fueled difficult conversations. At issue was the perception of conflict of interest, given that the Navy was both the funder of most marine mammal research as well as the agency taking actions that might harm marine mammals. The concern was that as funders of the research, the Navy would steer the direction in which data was interpreted.

This concern had varying importance to representatives. Some dismissed it because they felt confident that the science was being interpreted in an ethical manner. Scientist representatives funded by the Navy perceived this concern as insulting because it questioned their credibility and self-images as unbiased professionals. Other representatives saw this as a key concern to the Navy-marine mammal issue which undergirded the Navy's interpretations in support of their decisions. An NGO summarized her community's emphasis on the appearance of a conflict of interest: "The problem Eleni, it's not whether [Navy funded scientists] are compromised or not, it's the perception of conflict… not because we think everybody that takes Navy money is, you

know, dishonest and corrupt. In fact, I know a lot of these people and I know they're not."

Yet others felt the concern was important because it pointed to larger organizational constraints, not the unethical behavior of individuals. For example a NOAA/NMFS representative pointed to a lack of funding within his agency as the driver of this conflict:

> Our agency has virtually no funding to work on this issue. All the funding that we get is through the US Navy… if this is a high priority our agency should receive funding to do this type of research…it is certainly appropriate that the Navy funds the research and serve the people that are, you know at central to the problem. But the problem is that their funding the research, creates an apparent conflict of interest, that they're more likely to fund research that doesn't implicate them, I've never seen any evidence that this is true but the appearance is there…

A Navy representative also pointed to organizational constraints, in terms of the Navy's responsibility to oversee congressionally-appointed funds towards studying the impact of their impact on the environment. The following extended excerpt captures their description of a difficult conversation between the Navy and NGOs regarding funding in which she felt debating the issue was futile:

Well the thing that is frustrating is, what the Navy would say is until we started funding research, no one was funding research on this issue. So, you said that it was a problem, we couldn't prove that it wasn't a problem. So we started to fund research to determine if it was a problem or not. And the NGOs response was yes, but you're causing the problem. So it's a problem that you're funding the research. So the Navy's response was, "Okay. Then you fund research." If you fund research that won't be biased, then the NGOs response was, "Well that's not what we do. We don't fund research we're an advocacy group…" "Okay. If you don't want to fund the research, who do you think should fund the research?" So their response was, Navy should take all of its money and give it to someone else, and have them decide how the research gets funded. I mean it was all [already] academic research anyway. Navy gives it out as grants…So the academic scientists were angry, because when the NGOs said the research is all biased, they said, "You're telling us now, we're doing that research because we are getting grants from Navy so therefore all research is biased. So we're insulted." And the NGOs said, "Well, but if the Navy just gave the money as a block to some neutral organization and that organization made the decision what to fund, we'd be happier." Then the Navy said "Why don't one of you take it?" "No, we don't want to take it". And they said, "Okay, so you don't want the responsibility, but you don't want us to do it either. By the way, we are a federal agency and it's congressionally appropriated money. So we have to be responsible for it. We can't just give the money away…So if we just gave the

> money, no strings attached, to another entity and said we're not touching it so that we can't be perceived as biased, Congress could also come back and say 'you're wasting the tax payer's money, because you're not overseeing the expenditure of this money'". And the NGOs had no response to that because they didn't understand how the government works, in my opinion.

Constructive Difficult Conversations

All organizational representatives acknowledge that environmental conflicts will generate difficult conversations. Nonetheless, some described difficult conversations as being constructive because representatives had positive working relationships with each other. The analysis suggests that stronger and more open relationships were considered necessary by organizational representatives for weathering the difficult conversations that stem from interpretation debates. When positive working relationships develop, greater information sharing occurs, which in turn bolsters everyone's understanding of the issue and allows for more open discussion of interpretations. When relationships develop, organizational representatives begin to look at different interpretations of the science not as right or wrong, but rather recognizing that they are a product of worldviews and organizational perspectives They begin to recognize that a difficult task facing all organizations is how to proceed with Navy training in light of unknowns regarding impact on marine mammals. This doesn't mean that with positive working relationships, lawsuits are never necessary. But it does mean that a collaborative spirit

surrounds the debates and discussions that ensue which enable representatives to approach the issue and grapple with the uncertainty more creatively.

One example of such positive working relationships was provided by a NOAA/NMFS representative concerning the NOAA/NMFS and the Navy. According to this representative, developing positive working relationships enabled the two organizations to collaborate jointly on science projects in order to develop better assessments of the impacts of Navy activities on marine mammals. They were able to find areas of flexibility that would both enable them to fulfill their legal and organizational duties and develop creative solutions that "necessitate[ed] some outside of the box thinking sometimes." Attributing to the organizations' ability to weather difficult conversations on science interpretation, the representative explained why developing trusting relationships with Navy representatives helped:

> It's easier to have arguments, I think now. Now I just feel energized by, "Hey, we're going to have a lively discussion and I'm going to bring some facts here and we're going to go down to logical pathways and either get to the same place or not"…Now it's just sort of, its good because we have the relationship there… it's less difficult when you have the basis of the relationship. Because then it's just an exercise of getting the information together and seeing what make sense and there's a little pushing that, some people don't want to do something, and that's sometimes, I don't know. It's still hard if we just can't agree on something but it just seems like that happens less when you have this sort of relationship.

These positive working relationships enabled representatives from the two organizations to address the scientific uncertainty surrounding the issue, through open discussions, which served to bring people together and talk out their differences. One NOAA/NMFS representative described the importance of talking through the uncertainty in order to arrive at new conclusions: "I think it's just a manner of sitting down. Look, everyone is going to have own opinion based on their read with science. But I think when there is great uncertainty, perhaps something to where you can be more open to discussion to be convinced otherwise and so on."

One way to read these characterizations of positive working relationships is that when organizational representatives build trust in each other, they are less guarded and may be more open to engaging in learning conversations with the other side. What marks such conversations as different from other difficult conversations is not that they are without difficulty, but rather that representatives consider themselves more receptive to working through tough issues and other representatives' input. Scientists may also be present in such difficult conversations. Scientist representatives described open discussions as an opportunity to debate the strengths and weaknesses of different interpretations of the science. A Navy representative agreed, noting that scientists, Navy and NOAA/NMFS representatives were able to reach "good decisions" despite an arduous conversation process trying to reach some mutual agreements on scientific topics.

Established relationships also enabled representatives to move conversations outside formal engagement events into more informal settings. For example, a Navy

representative commenting on the productive relationship with NOAA/NMFS, said that many times the two sides would have these open discussions in sidebar conversations at meetings and conventions or over dinner. The Navy representative described open discussion at dinners in this way:

> [Navy, NOAA/NMFS and scientist representatives] would all at conferences go to dinner and talk about how do we tag every animal, how can we do this, how can we get a project going? There was a lot of free conversations, a lot of ideas of ways and those kind of senses or brainstorming things, I was a lot freer to say "yeah, let's see what we can do. Maybe I can talk to the boss and we can work on something." We had a lot more free conversations where it was about coming up with solutions for things.

Representatives saw potential for such open discussions and debates of science interpretations in the Navy-NGO relationship. One Navy representative recalled a time when NGO and Navy representatives engaged in more of such conversations: "We brought [the NGOs] into the tent on developing a research program…our scientists cooperated with them. And so this was sort of a golden age, if you will, of cooperation, you know, with NGOs." In this "golden age of cooperation," Navy representatives felt comfortable calling up NGO representatives who were also past litigants, and voicing concerns over negative characterizations of Navy training activities in their press releases. The representative recalled how a build-up of trust between the two sides made

such bold and direct outreach possible. In reflecting on the successful Navy-NGO relationships formed, NGO representatives attributed success to the sides getting to know each other and breaking down negative and inaccurate stereotypes of each other. Developing relationships meant learning about each other, not just the science, which served to humanize the issue. An NGO representative summarized the potential of building relationships to weather debates and disagreements: "I found over the years that given that you didn't agree with somebody, it's more productive to treat them respectfully and courteously, then sometimes over time it's remarkable how the relationship that you develop can come around on matters in different ways you never imagined."

Discussion

This study advances our understanding of interorganizational conversations in environmental conflicts by exploring the factors that generate relatively easier and difficult conversations among organizational representatives in public and private contexts. In identifying science informational exchanges as easier conversations and science interpretation debates as more difficult, the study suggests that science is both a conversational affordance and constraint in the Navy-marine mammal issue. In addition to this finding about the conversational affordances and constraints that science lends to the discussion of the Navy-marine mammal issue, this research provides insight into the importance of relationship building among representatives to managing difficult conversations constructively. These results extend previous research on difficult conversations in environmental conflicts by examining the interorganizational

conversational dynamics among representatives who interact across public and private settings. The implication of the results is that it suggests the theoretical and practical significance of learning among representatives for transforming difficult interorganizational conversations in environmental conflicts into more positive generative conversations.

Three findings emerged from the study that are consistent with the existing literature on environmental conflict. First, science enables and complicates conversations among representatives in the interorganizational setting of the Navy-marine mammal issue. Science affords conversations among representatives with technical interest or expertise, a common goal to learn, and who share a view regarding the legitimacy of scientific information. In contrast, science constrains conversations among representatives with organizationally-socialized values and emotional concerns stemming from legal, organizational and political interests. These findings lend empirical support for previous work asserting that difficult conversations emerge around hard-to-talk about issues marked by high stakes and uncertainty (Patterson et al, 2011; Stone et al., 2010), particularly scientific uncertainty in environmental conflicts (Daniels & Walker, 1996). My findings suggest that in difficult conversations, representatives grapple with the complexities introduced by scientific uncertainty pertaining to environmental issues, and perceive high legal, organizational and policy stakes associated with what they say.

Second, this research highlights the importance of external factors that influence representatives' conversations about science. Legal, organizational and political interests

within the larger interorganizational system shaped difficult conversations on science. This comports with our previous understanding of environmental conflicts as involving various layers of complexity (Daniels & Walker, 2001). These larger systemic layers add an additional layer of ambiguity beyond the ambiguity posed by scientific uncertainty which make these interorganizational conversations difficult. The challenge for representatives in these conversations is not only to ascertain the impacts of Navy training activities on marine mammals, but also what is the best way to mitigate these impacts given the various perspectives at play. As others have previously noted (Ozawa, 1996; Mansfield & Hass, 2006; Sarewitz, 2004), the lack of scientific consensus derives from how diverse interests apply science to support their positions, which makes these conversations difficult. This research provides empirical evidence of the complexities associated with considering science in the realm of policy, law, and organizational goals. These various layers shape how representatives interpret science amid high uncertainty, and when these interpretations clash, representatives' conflicting positions fuel a lack of scientific consensus on the issue (Sarewitz, 2004).

Third, this research also provides support for previous assertions that science does not resemble a neutral talking stick for decision makers to use when managing environmental conflicts (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Conversations among representatives from diverse organizations are more than just about ascertaining the best way forward on an issue from the best available science, or in the words of The Martian's Mark Watney, having to "science the shit out of this" (2015). Environmental conflicts necessitate interorganizational conversations embedded in socionatural systems

merging science with politics (Daniels & Walker, 1996). As a result, these conflicts, such as the Navy-marine mammal issue, can be thought of as a "public science controversy" which "is an ethical or political conflict which helps call into existence a scientific dispute that potentially has a direct bearing on its resolution" (Crick & Gabriel, 2010, p. 207).

This research also extends our current understanding of environmental conflict in three important ways. First, exposing the multiple layers of difficult conversations among organizational representatives in such public science controversies highlights the inherent emotionality associated with their complexity. Previous scholars have recognized that environmental conflicts involve emotional concerns (Cass & Walker, 2009; Endres, 2009; Fisher, 2000; Manzo, 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Vining & Tyler, 1999) and that difficult conversations ensue because of a clash between the public's emotional concerns and expert and decision makers' scientific and technical concerns (Cox, 2013; Endres, 2009; Kinsella, 2004; 2002; McComas, 2003; Senecah, 2004). Though previous research has addressed emotional concerns as a characteristic of the public (Fisher, 2000; Manzo, 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Vining & Tyler, 1999), my findings extend our insight into the realm of interorganizational conversations by suggesting that organizational representatives, including those in expert and decision-maker roles, also have emotional concerns.

This research recognizes emotion as a core complication for non-public and public actors. Representatives do not only objectively discuss "rational" matters of science. They also grapple with contested values, worldviews and interests embedded in

their interpretations of science. Difficult conversations are influenced by political considerations, judgments, values, fears, stereotypes, and organizational identities. These concerns are similar to those aired by the public in environmental conflicts in that they are emotional at their core and shaping the perspectives that representatives take in conversation with each other. Beyond the relatively easier exchanges of science, emotional concerns complicate representatives' conversations regarding the Navy-marine mammal issue.

Second, this research highlights the importance of the relational dimension of environmental conflicts. Previous research has recognized that relationships are an important aspect of conflicts (Gray, 1989; Gwartney et al., 2002; Walker, 1997; 2013) and that building positive working relationships leads conflicting actors to realize their collaborative potential (Innes & Booher, 1999). My findings extend our insight into the realm of interorganizational conversations by suggesting the importance of building personalized relationships among representatives for managing emotionally-laden difficult conversations in a constructive fashion. Representatives are able to manage difficult conversations constructively due to a shift from professional relationships, where representatives engage in their capacity as professionals on their differences, to personalized relationships, where their personal connections and familiarity with each other serve to humanize their conversations on divisive subjects.

As evidenced in representatives' feedback, interpersonal trust may develop while spending time with each other at meals, breaks or in general chit chat. Developed mutual trust helps parties deal with their differences constructively (Innes & Booher, 1999;

Yaffee &Wondolleck, 2000) and promotes positive and collaborative interpersonal relationships (Fisher, 2009; San Martin-Rodriguez, 2005). Through trusting relationships, parties are better at weathering potential conflicts that may arise (Linden, 2002) and more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors with each other (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Getting to know each other by talking about subjects such as ones family, serves to humanize contentious issues and "get past the caricatures" of each other. Previous scholars have noted the transformative effects of disputants personalizing their relationships by getting to know each other (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001) and the importance of being able to do so in private where they are out of the public's scrutinizing view (Friedman, 1994). Learning is key to the ability of these humanizing relationships to manage difficult conversations among representatives as developing personalized relationships may open up space for more learning to occur among organizational representatives as they begin to view each other as people struggling to manage the complexity of the situation versus objects to be manipulated to achieve one's interest. For this reason, Stone et al. (2010) describe how difficult conversations managed constructively transform into learning conversations. One explanation for this transformation is Martin Buber's (1957) notion of "I-Thou", which points to true relationship developing between people only when they are able to experience each other as whole complex human beings who reflect present reality, rather than "I-It" relationships in which people have preconceived ideas about each other and experience each other as partially-viewed objects that represent past reality. Buber's argument

suggests that humanizing relationships encourage learning that enables people to reconcile past inaccurate stereotypes of each other to view each other as they are in reality.

When people treat each other as humans, they are more likely to listen to each other. Minds may not be changed during the course of such personalized relationships, and yet having those relationships provides a sense of safety in being able to stay open to learning new information and exploring differences. Through a relational approach to contentious issues, people are better able to consider the multiple perspectives that exist and more willing to risk that their perspective on the issue changes (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). A "golden era of cooperation" recounted by a Navy representative is an example of a time when having such personalized relationships with NGO representatives meant willing to take a risk by reaching out personally to them with questions and concerns about their organization's press releases critical of Navy training activities.

The importance of learning when managing difficult conversations (Stone et al., 2010) and developing relationships in environmental conflicts (Daniels & Walker, 1996; 2001) has been noted before. People develop new understandings and perspectives when they adopt a learning framework and open themselves to learn from others; their conversations are transformed by this new information (Brummel et al., 2010; Schusler, Decker, & Pfeffer, 2003). Learning is important because it contributes to a pluralistic approach to environmental decision-making where various actors' independence and interdependence are valued (Anderson, Clement, & Van Crowder, 1998; Walker, 2007).

Individuals learn from each other's expertise on an issue and as a result expand their shared knowledge (Daniels & Walker, 1996).

Third, this research highlights the importance of thinking systemically about relationships among organizational actors. The emphasis on learning about the system is central in Daniels and Walker's (1996; 2001) collaborative learning approach to managing environmental conflict. Learning activities in their model aim to work diverse actors through expanded understandings of environmental conflicts and solutions. Their model emphasizes systemic thinking that foregrounds the complex substantive elements of environmental conflicts. My findings extend our insight of conflict management by suggesting the importance of systemic thinking that foregrounds the relational elements of these complex issues as well as substantive elements. Representatives are able to learn more deeply about contentious issues due to a shift from situation-based discussions, in which learning conversations emphasize systemic thinking in order to improve the problem, to relationship-based discussions, in which learning conversations emphasize systemic thinking in order to improve relationships. My research suggests learning conversations in these settings address the systemic factors that influence representatives' conversations more squarely.

While addressing the issues themselves remain important to managing environmental conflicts (Daniels & Walker, 2001; Ramirez & Fernandez, 2005), the approach I am arguing for is more closely aligned to other approaches in its emphasis of relational development over reaching agreement (Bush & Folger, 2004; Chasin, et al., 1996). In arguing for this new direction in learning-based conflict management, I draw

inspiration from previous work by Nicotera and Mahon (2013) regarding developing systemic awareness of common "structural positioning problems" to generate collaborative relationships among conflicting nurse units and Fisher and Ury's (2011) famous contention that managing conflict is all about examining interests that underlie positions.

The knowledge that representatives gain in this alternative approach goes beyond technical understandings and problem definitions to each other's priorities, values, and underlying interests. This requires that representatives cultivate awareness of how their difficulties in conversations are connected to larger influencing factors they may not realize. This was evidenced by the data in which representatives explained that often their difficult conversations were not the result of interpersonal conflict but rather larger factors that influenced their conversations. Learning conversations benefit from personalized relationships in which representatives are able to get beyond superficial discussions of scientific interpretation and learn about the underlying emotionally-laden legal, political and organizational interests at stake that complicate their discussions.

This study also has implications for intervening into environmental conflicts. One key consideration pertains to the design of intervention approaches that promote the development of personalized relationships among organizational representatives involved in environmental conflict. A key design principle for crafting interventions becomes how to develop representatives' understanding of both complex environmental issues and more relationally-focused issues. Towards achieving development on both fronts, a core task of interventions is to break through destructive communication

patterns among representatives of conflicting organizations. Future research is needed to develop design elements of interventions that would afford meaningful relationship development opportunities while also engaging representatives in substantive conversations on the issue. Such research could investigate the effectiveness and receptivity of learning activities designed to encourage representatives to interact in new and more constructive ways with each other and develop mutual understandings of each other's interests.

A second key consideration for developing interventions pertains to the facilitator role. The facilitator plays a key role in encouraging people to engage in new communication patterns (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001). Such a transformation may require facilitators who take a more directive role to push or nudge representatives out of their old habits. Indeed, representatives indicated that their dismay with a multi-stakeholder dialogue in 2004 over the Navy-marine mammal issue largely stemmed from what they perceived as the facilitators' inability to direct by pushing representatives past their positions to question each other's underlying interests through "hard questions." One possibility for research is to investigate the use of such questions to nudge representatives to address the relational issues of their conflict (Walker, 1997), which get at the emotionally-charged policy, legal and organizational interests that underlie their difficult conversations (Stone et al., 2010). Another possibility is to investigate how such questioning may encourage representatives to realistically engage in new ways of communicating within the system of organizational actors in which they interact (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001).

In conclusion, this study focused on difficult conversations regarding complex environmental issues. It elucidated various factors leading to these difficulties and in doing so, contributed new insight into the importance of the inherent emotionality of these issues' complexity, of personalized relationships for fostering learning conversations, and of systemic thinking aimed at the relational aspects of environmental conflicts. These three areas of contributions highlight potential avenues for managing difficult interorganizational conversations in environmental conflicts.

CHAPTER III

MANAGING EMOTIONAL MOMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT

Overview

This chapter presents a study focused on the role of emotion in interorganizational difficult conversations pertaining to complex environmental issues. This case study focused on Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives across six organizations involved in this issue to generate data regarding representatives' emotional experiences in conversations with other representatives on the Navy-marine mammal issue. The data were analyzed in a two-phase process where emotional experiences were initially categorized and then further differentiated according to felt emotions, emotion management strategies, and implicit communication rules. Three types of emotional moments emerged within the typology: (1) violated expectations, (2) personal attacks, and (3) criticism encounters. Professionalism emerged as a key concept associated with how representatives managed emotional moments. These findings yield several implications: the relationship of professionalism to the experience and management of emotional moments, the negative valence of emotional moments, and the influence of facework in managing emotional moments.

Introduction

Complex environmental issues have high conflict potential because they bring together a diverse set of actors with varied interests. In environmental conflicts, such as the ongoing conflict pertaining to Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals, actors confronting competing interests in decisions are compelled to interact with one another to manage these issues and make decisions (Cox, 2013). Given that conflict is constituted in communication (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007; Putnam, 2013), it becomes important to understand how communication, particularly the conversations between and among the network of actors involved in a specific environmental conflict, construct and manage conflict in their talk (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000).

Current research regarding the role of communication in environmental conflicts has tended to focus on participatory communication (Cox, 2013; Endres, 2009; Peterson, Peterson & Peterson, 2007; Walker, 2007), the intersection of environmental planning and public participation (Depoe, Delicath & Elsenbeer, 2004; Martin, 2007), risk communication in public meetings (McComas 2003; McComas, Besley & Black, 2010), and consensus-building processes (Gwartney, Fessenden, & Landt, 2002; Low, 2008; Peterson, Peterson & Peterson, 2005). While such research is valuable, we know relatively little about the role of emotion in environmental conflicts. Feelings as well as personal and professional sentiments are likely to play a key role in constructing and managing these conflicts given the emotionally-charged nature of the issues (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013) and the inherent difficulty in managing such conversations given people's personal and professional identities (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010).

The majority of literature regarding the role of emotion in environmental conflict tends to focus on the interaction between government officials and citizens in public meetings and hearings (Besley, McComas, & Trumbo, 2012; Cass & Walker, 2009; Vining & Tyler, 1999). However, this body of work paints only a partial picture of the role of emotion in environmental conflict as these conflicts often play out in conversations among key organizational representatives in private or semi-private settings and do not always involve citizens. In both public and private settings, members of organizations with key stakes in environmental conflicts have conversations on complex environmental issues, in their capacity as representatives for their organizations (Cox, 2013; Sidaway, 2005). It is reasonable to assume that representatives are socialized into organizational expectations and norms regarding the display of emotions in these conversation settings. However, we do not know how representatives construe the appropriate display of emotion within interorganizational conversations and how they manage emotion when they perform boundary spanning roles, where they are likely to encounter representatives who operate under different organizational norms pertaining to emotion (Waldron, 2012; Wharton & Erickson, 1993).

It is important to study the role of emotion in these interorganizational conversations among representatives as much of the conflict pertaining to complex environmental issues plays out within these conversations. Examining the emotional dynamics of representatives' conversations allows us to capture a more complete picture of the role that emotion plays in the way that these conflicts move forward. I address this

need by contributing new insight into an organizational view of emotion in environmental conflict by shedding light on the management and display of emotions in interorganizational conversations. I begin by reviewing how organizational scholars have previously studied emotion and workplace emotion to create a useful vocabulary for assessing relevant extant work undertaken in the environmental literature. After describing the case for this study, I then explain the methods I used to collect and analyze the data. I conclude by explaining how the current study extends our understanding of emotional expression in interorganizational conversations in environmental conflicts by characterizing the emotional moments representatives experience and suggesting the significance of professional norms in guiding emotion display in these moments.

Workplace Emotion and Professionalism in Environmental Conflict

The organizational communication literature on emotion is an important starting place for understanding the emotional dynamics of environmental conflict as members of various organizations are socialized into the professional norms and expectations of their respective organizations which influence how they manage emotion in conversation with others. Scholars have become very interested in studying emotion in organizational contexts over the last twenty years (e.g., Fineman, 2000; Hochchild, 1983; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Obling, 2013). This interest has emerged as the traditional concept of a rationally-oriented, objectivity-obsessed organization has given way to a more holistic view that acknowledges the inherent emotionality of work (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Waldron, 2000). Still, emotionality is often viewed as a negative phenomenon that needs

to be controlled in order to maintain organizational effectiveness, though some do argue that emotion can serve important positive functions that enable organizational effectiveness (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

While a variety of definitions and approaches toward emotion exist (Guerrero et al., 1998; Jones, 2000), a communicative approach to emotion and emotion work views emotion as a social and interaction-based phenomenon and emphasizes the display or expression of internal feelings such as anger or love, over cognitive appraisal of those emotional experiences (Fieberg & Kramer, 1998; Fineman & Sturdy, 1999; Jones, 2000). Workplace emotion research has been largely guided by, and appreciative of, Hochchild's (1983) work on "emotional labor" (see Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Bolton, 2001; 2003 for notable critiques of that work). Emotional labor is "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochchild, 1983, p. 7). Emotional labor is performed by members whose job entails managing their emotion internally in order to produce an inauthentic emotion display controlled by profit-seeking management (Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2007). For example, employees at Disneyland always perform "happiness" when interacting with guests because their job is to contribute to the fantasyland in which they work (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). While much of this research views emotional labor as a detriment to individuals, for example causing burnout and stress (Hochchild, 1983), several scholars have also noted that emotional labor is a beneficial skill to workers (Conrad & Witte, 1994; Shuler & Sypher, 2000). Previous research on emotional labor has looked at a host of jobs

including 911 operators (Tracy & Tracy, 1998), nurses (Diefendorff, Erickson, Grandey, & Dahling, 2011) and correctional officers (Tracy, 2005; Waldron & Krone, 1991).

"Emotion work" is distinct from emotional labor given its focus on authenticity and control. This term captures the efforts that workers make to manage the emotions they naturally experience during on the job (Miller et al., 2007; Waldron, 2012). For example, previous studies have addressed the emotional work experienced by academic professors (Miller, 2002) and police (Pogrebin & Poole, 1991). Miller et al. (2007) identify several additional types of workplace emotion, including "emotion with work," which is the relational emotion that emerges when coworkers interact (Kramer & Hess, 2002; Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Waldron, 2000). "Emotion at work" refers to outside emotion brought into the workplace such as grief and "emotion toward work" is emotion directed at one's work and includes emotions such as job satisfaction (Miller, Ellis, Zook, & Lyles, 1990).

Workers both cognitively experience and express or communicate their emotion in visible displays when they interact with others (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). What is felt and what is displayed varies across different types of workplace emotions. Emotional expression shapes the way organizational members construct conversations and interactions in the workplace, whether with clients or coworkers (Ekman, 1997). Previous studies have found that organizational members manage emotions partly based on their own personal preferences, though organizational expectations or policies factor heavily into emotion display (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998; Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips,

1998) frequently stemming from organizational and professional norms (Hayes & Metts, 2008).

The emphasis on emotional expression highlights display rules (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Display rules are "overlearned habits about who can show emotion to whom and when they can show it" (Ekman, 1984, p. 320). Organizational norms guide representatives' emotion display through these communication rules (Diefendorff et al., 2011; Scott & Myers, 2005). For example, Scott and Myers (2005) documented how a firefighter presented a stoic face when dealing with a burn victim in critical condition, because of his organization's expectation to "[neutralize his] own emotions in order to calm the strong emotions of patients and loved ones" (p. 76).

Display rules can foster integration, differentiation, or neutrality (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). Integrative display rules require that representatives display emotions that foster a sense of warmth and closeness, such as when social workers display empathetic feelings. Display rules associated with differentiation aim to set distance between people, such as when bouncers are required to display toughness. Emotional neutrality is expressed through masking display rules that instruct representatives to convey emotional neutrality in an attempt to convey authority over others, such as when police officers remain calm in the face of stressful situations. For example, Smith and Kleinman (1989) found that "'Professionals' are supposed to know more than their clients and to have personable, but not personal, relationships with them" (p. 56). This display rule mandates representatives keep an emotional distance from their clients in

order to maintain neutrality that fosters their authority. Thus, organizations extend particular rules to their members regarding acceptable forms of emotional display.

Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) note that organizations influence individual emotion display by selecting those who conform to their ideals, socializing newcomers formally through training or informally through observing others (Scott & Myers, 2005), and using punishment and rewards to maintain conformity on the job. Miller (2002) argues that representatives are not only socialized into an organization's feeling and display rules, but also to implicit professional norms. The implicit nature of these rules stem from the role itself and the professional socialization that comes along with it (e.g., doctors socialized into performing the role of the doctor). Previous research has examined the organizational and occupational socialization of bill collectors (Sutton, 1991), Disney employees (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989) and firefighters (Scott & Myers, 2005).

Through emotion display and the enactment of display rules, organizational members decide to either express felt emotions or manage them (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998). Individuals seek to manage their own emotions, or control the emotion display of others (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). In reciprocal emotion management, coworkers offer each other help with managing emotions, as a form of support (Lively, 2000). Previous research has highlighted several types of management strategies used to enact display rules. Emotional detachment is used in order to prevent emotional expression that would interfere with professional relationships (Fineman, 2000). Additional strategies include simulation (fabricating or pretending through display), inhibition

(neutralizing the display of a felt emotion), and masking (displaying an emotion when another is felt) (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Hayes & Metts, 2005). Masking is particularly prevalent in organizational settings where representatives must suppress felt emotions to appear calm (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). For example, Pogrebin and Poole (1991) studied how masking strategies enable police to maintain calm objective demeanors and achieve "a professional stance of being calm and in control" (p. 396)" in front of citizens.

The workplace emotion literature provides a useful vocabulary to see how the environmental literature has engaged with emotion during conflict. Understanding emotion is central to understanding environmental conflicts, as interaction among actors in these complex issues is inherently highly emotionally charged. The emotionality of their interaction derives from the emotionality of the issues themselves as underlying the emphasis on science associated with environmental issues (Endres, 2009; McComas, 2003), these contested issues are, in fact, very much emotional in nature (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). This is because emotion is at the core of all conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Jones, 2000) and for environmental issues, emotion is involved in contested meanings of place (Buijs, Arts, Elands, & Lengkeek, 2011) and value differences among stakeholders (Vining & Tyler, 1999).

Grappling with scientific uncertainty on these complex issues highlights the emotionality associated with risky policy decisions that have social, economic, political, and environmental consequences for different stakeholders. The emotionality of actors' interaction also derives from having conversations about difference. The conversations

that emerge among actors on these complex issues have the potential to be difficult as people communicate diverse and often conflicting interests (Stone et al., 2010). Emotion pervades difficult conversations, as Stone et al. (2010) note that "difficult conversations do not just involve feelings, they are at their very core about feelings" (p. 13).

Given the inherent emotionality of interaction among actors, it is important to study emotion in environmental conflict and understand how emotion may facilitate or hinder forward movement in these conversations. The existing environmental literature has tended to focus on the role of emotion in interaction among actors in public settings centering on the interaction between governmental officials and citizens. This topic has been studied within the literature on environmental conflict as public participation in environmental decision-making (Besley et al., 2012; Cass & Walker, 2009; Manzo, 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Vining & Tyler, 1999). Private citizens may become involved in complex environmental issues through formal public participation opportunities such as public meetings (Cox, 2013; Depoe et al., 2004). Emotion typically has been studied as an attribute of public citizens and studied in the context of interaction between decision makers and citizens during those public opportunities (Beck, Littlefield, & Weber, 2012; Kinsella, 2004; 2002; Senecah, 2004).

However, government official-citizen interaction is not the only kind that takes place in environmental conflicts. The existing literature captures only a partial picture of the role of emotion in environmental conflicts as it does not address the role of emotion in inter-organizational conversations; that is conversations that occur between representatives of organizations that are involved with the conflict (Beck et al., 2012;

Kinsella, 2004; 2002; Predmore, Stern, Mortimer, & Seesholtz, 2011; Senecah, 2004). The organizations involved in complex environmental issues include a range of organized interests including environmental groups, scientists, corporation/business lobbyists, and public officials (Cox, 2013, Sidaway, 2005). This means that environmental conflicts necessitate interaction among organizational members who serve as representatives.

Representatives who interact with others outside of their organization have been termed in the organizational literature as boundary spanners (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). Boundary spanners are the front line of their organizations in that they are trusted to deliver positive first impressions to the organizational outsiders with whom they interact (Waldron, 2012). "Most importantly, by enacting a pleasant, calm demeanor, these emotion workers maintain a kind of emotional firewall between the organization and its public" (Waldron, 2012, p. 68). Such boundary spanners who work on the edge of their organizations interact with others who operate under different workplace norms. They are more likely to need to manage emotional display than those whose work involves interaction solely within the organization (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). They also may be influenced by the norms of those with whom they interact (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Conversations among organizational representatives serving as boundary spanners happen in both public and private settings, however, we know relatively little about the role of emotion in the context of conversations among these actors. One notable study by Predmore et al. (2011) provides an initial foray into this general

direction by addressing the emotional experiences of officials who attend public meetings. Taking an organizational view of environmental conflicts would further enrich our understanding of the role of emotion in these complex issues and develop a more detailed picture of the emotionality associated with environmental conflicts. This study poses the following research question: "What is the role of emotion in representatives' interorganizational conversations and what emotion management strategies do they employ?"

Methods

My research question regarding emotion in interorganizational conversations was investigated through qualitative interviews with participants. Participants were current or prior current representatives of organizations involved in an ongoing controversy regarding Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals. The interview data were analyzed in a two-phase process whereby I identified and characterized representatives' encounters with strong emotions in conversations on the issue.

The Navy-Marine Mammal issue

The Navy-marine mammal issue refers to controversy surrounding Navy training activities such as sonar use and underwater detonations, and their impact on marine mammals. These activities are suspected of causing significant harm and death to marine mammals; however, there is significant disagreement among scientists regarding the extent and mechanisms of this harm (DeReuiter et al., 2013; Evans and England, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2005; Jepson et al., 2003; Tyack et al., 2011). The key organizations involved with this issue include the Navy, the National Marine Fisheries Service

(NMFS) regulating Navy activities, the Marine Mammal Commission (The Commission) as an independent government oversight of federal actions for marine mammal protection, various environmental non-government organizations (NGOs), the California Coastal Commission (the Coastal Commission) as the state oversight of federal agency actions in state waters, and the scientist community. The NMFS is distinct from its parent agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); however, because they regard themselves having a shared interest on this issue, I will refer to all NOAA and NMFS representatives with a NMFS affiliation. These organizations have tended to interpret the scientific basis of the issue and the need for training regulation or marine mammal protection differently.

Contention and controversy surround this issue for various reasons. First, the public appeal of marine mammals is high and the Navy-marine mammal issue has received a great deal of public and media attention. There is pressure to manage this issue in a way that the public will find palatable. Also, the organizations involved cut across numerous sectors and at different levels of government. Public statements issued by the Navy and environmentalists suggest a contentious relationship among organizations in this conflict (Environmental News Service, 2008; 2010; Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, 2004; Rice, 2009). This in addition to a previous study conducted (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010) where Navy and NGO representatives described limited or adversarial communication, suggests that representatives have difficult conversations pertaining to this issue.

This issue has escalated into legal conflict, starting back in 1997, when an NGO challenged the Navy's ability train off the coast of Hawaii, unsuccessfully (Zirbel, Balint, & Parsons, 2011). In 2008, a U.S. Supreme Court decision found in favor of the Navy because "any such [irreparable injury to marine mammals] is outweighed by the public interest and the Navy's interest in effective, realistic training of its sailors" (Winter v. NRDC, 2008, 3). Lawsuits continue as part of this ongoing controversy. In 2013, several NGOs challenged both the Navy and NMFS who had approved its activities, and won (Center for Biological Diversity, 2015).

Data and Participants

The data used in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews from 29 participants (Tracy, 2013). I initially identified potential participants through purposeful sampling and then broadened the list of those solicited using snowball sampling. I generated a list of potential participants including existing contacts stemming from previous research projects. I also found potential participants' contact information from a variety of publically available documents pertaining to the issue. These documents included attendance lists for dialogue and science workshops, a recent book on the issue called War of the Whales (Horwitz, 2014), press releases and news articles, and legal documents pertaining to litigation on the issue. I asked all participants for suggested contacts and then contacted those individuals as well. Finally, the study was also announced in two popular research listservs relevant to the issue.

During the recruitment process, potential participants were emailed an information sheet and invitation to participate in an interview. The information sheet

indicated an assurance of confidentiality and requested recording of interviews. Eighty-three representatives were recruited across six key organizations identified through the sampling strategy. Twenty-nine representatives participated, all of whom met the following criteria: (1) prior/current affiliation with a key organization involved in the issue, and (2) prior/current experience interacting with representatives of other key organizations involved in the issue. The final sample represents a 35% response rate, which is explained by (1) my efforts to solicit from any potentially qualified individuals even though a key informant suggested 30-40 total representatives currently involved, and (2) a high number individuals currently involved in the issue who cited legal concerns in declining my invitation to participate. Table 3 reports the organizational affiliation information for the final sample.

Over the course of four months beginning in end of June 2015, in-person and phone interviews were conducted, each lasting 45-90 minutes. I provided the interview guide to participants in advance upon request. It contained questions regarding participants' experiences with and management strategies of emotion in conversations with other representatives. Follow up interviews were requested from any participant with whom I ran out of time. Across the twenty-nine representatives, interviews totaled about 36 hours and 1000 transcribed pages.

Table 3. *Demographic Summary for Study 2 Sample*

Organization	Recruited	Participated[a]	Response Rate[b]
Navy	22	7	30%
NGO community	24	11	48%
NOAA/NMFS	16	5	31%
Science community	10	3	30%
The Commission	7	3	43%
Coastal Commission	2	1	50%

a – Number of participants totals 30 in table because one representative was interviewed under their previous and current organizational affiliations
b – response rates rounded to nearest whole number

Analysis

The interview data were analyzed by looking to identify representatives' experiences in conversations where they talked about strong emotions being present. I used a two-phase analysis process. First, I pulled all excerpts from the transcripts where representatives described their experiences in emotionally charged conversations. I did not segregate the excerpts by representatives' affiliations but rather analyzed all the excerpts together. Then I coded the situation described in each excerpt. For example, if a representative described a conversation in which another representative questioned his integrity due to a disagreement, I labeled this situation as a personal attack. Once I assembled these coded situations, I looked to see how they clustered and this analysis generated groupings. Each grouping referred to a type of emotionally charged situation within conversations.

These situations were intriguing because they pointed to moments during conversations that were particularly memorable to representatives. Specific memorable

situations have been previously noted to serve a critical function within conversations with high conflict potential (Putnam, 2004; Sloan & Oliver, 2013). This is because moments in conversations can be quite powerful. For example Putnam (2004) observes that transformative moments can alter the course of a negotiation among adversarial groups. This is because they reflect turning points in negotiation, where shifts in levels of abstraction of language can produce new possibilities for negotiated outcomes. Critical emotional incidents represent key turning points during stakeholder interaction critical to the development of trust among groups in multi-stakeholder partnerships (Sloan & Oliver, 2013). To preserve what I observed during data analysis that these emotionally-challenging situations were bracketed experiences during the course of conversations, I labeled them as emotional moments.

I wanted to further explore the nature of these emotional moments. To determine the characteristics of each type of emotional moment, I conducted another round of analysis, which entailed identifying the various dimensions that characterized them and describing how the different types of moments varied on those dimensions. As I re-read through my data pertaining to each emotional moment, it was clear to me that there were particular emotions that representatives recounted experiencing during each one as well as management strategies that they described employing to manage the expression of those felt emotions. Since these explicit descriptions of felt emotions and management strategies were common across all types of emotional moments I identified, I decided a good starting point for exploring this new concept was to re-analyze the data within each particular type on these two dimensions.

I coded for felt emotions based on representatives' descriptions of their feelings in emotional moments. For example, if a representative indicated he/she felt angry in a particular situation, I coded the felt emotion as angry. I relied on representatives' definitions of their feelings even if their description fit the common definition of a different emotion, out of recognition that emotional experience is subjective (Jones, 2000) and my interest in learning about representatives' interpretations of their emotional experiences (Tracy, 2004). I assessed the valence of emotional moments, based off the felt emotions indicated in each type, because valence is a contributing factor to how emotions are expressed (Waldron & Krone, 1991). Then, I coded for management strategies in regards to how felt emotions were expressed, as made explicit by representatives. For example, if a representative said he/she felt anger in an emotional moment, and then described managing that anger by reprimanding another whose actions had triggered their anger, I coded their management strategy as scolding.

During this phase of analysis, I identified a variety of contexts in which conversations encapsulating emotional moments occurred. Representatives' stories of conversations spanned a variety of public (such as public meetings, multi-stakeholder dialogue processes, conferences) and private (such as settlement negotiations, meeting sidebars, and intergroup meetings) settings. Although certainly worthwhile for future study, in my initial exploration of emotional moments for this study, I did not code emotional moments for context. I made this choice upon realizing that representatives' descriptions of emotional experiences across settings revealed their common reference to the context of emotional moments as a professional setting.

To further explore what professionalism meant to emotional moments, I developed communication rules suggested by my analysis of felt emotions and management strategies for each type. For example, in violated expectations emotional moments, my analysis indicated that representatives managed the display of frustration in professional settings by detachment and indirect expression, which both pointed to the importance of maintaining a neutral demeanor. Their maintenance of a neutral demeanor was connected to the particular type of situation, in which representatives experienced unproductive conversations that necessitated the use of the courts to become more productive. As suggested by this analysis, I developed the communication rule: Professionals should maintain a neutral demeanor in unproductive conversations amongst themselves; productivity can be regained through adjudication.

I organized the results of my analysis of emotional moments into a typology to clearly see how the different types that I identified varied on the three dimensions that emerged during analysis: (1) felt emotions, (2) management strategies, and (3) implicit communication rules. Negative case analysis was used in order to check interpretations of my typology (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). I also iteratively checked my interpretations of stories and the groupings creating my typology, throughout the analysis process. The three identified emotional moments are not claimed to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive but instead, useful as a starting point for articulating emotional challenges to enacted professionalism in difficult conversations.

Results

The research question considered the role of emotion in representatives' interorganizational conversations on the Navy-marine mammal issue. From my analysis of the interview data, I found that: (1) representatives perceived strong negative emotions as characterizing difficult conversations, (2) representatives perceived that negative emotional displays needed to be controlled, and (3) implicit professional standards informed the kinds of action they felt should be taken to control negative emotional displays. My analysis suggested that these qualities constituted what could be described as emotional moments and also yielded insight into their management within difficult conversations. The definition of emotional moments as suggested by my analysis is that they are bracketed experiences within difficult conversations in which representatives seek to control emotion display in line with standards of professionalism.

The data suggests three types of emotional moments in which representatives seek to perform professional emotional display: (1) violated expectations, (2) personal attacks, and (3) public criticism encounters. Representatives associated a negative valence to these moments, meaning that representatives associated the display of emotions as generally negative (Guerrero, Andersen, & Trost, 1998). I decided to explore their negative characterization further by focusing my analysis on the challenges they associate with encountering strong emotions in conversations. In Table 4, I present the characteristics of these various emotional moments, including the implicit communication rules for professional emotion displays I developed from my analysis of these characteristics.

Violated Expectations

Most representatives recognized that progress needed to be made on the Navy-marine mammal issue. One representative described it this way, "You know we've been in court over and over for the last 20 years…at some point you've got to be able to start to work around those issues, trying to find solutions to the problems." Emotional moments associated with violated expectations typically occurred when representatives entered into conversations seeking to reach some common ground with others, and expecting other representatives to do the same, only to find that the other representatives held firmly to their previous positions, refused to compromise, and resisted considering other perspectives. For example, representatives approached conversations with the expectation that the different groups would move forward in some way on the Navy-marine mammal issue. The idea of making progress on the issue could occur in a variety of ways including receiving validation of one's concerns, compromise, reconciling differences, and a meeting of the minds.

Table 4. *Typology of Emotional Moments*

Type	Felt emotions	Management strategies	Communication rule for emotion display
Violated Expectations	Frustration	Detachment, Indirect expression	Professionals should maintain a neutral demeanor in unproductive conversations amongst themselves; productivity can be regained through adjudication.
Personal Attacks	Anger, Irritation	Scolding, Detachment	Displays of negative emotion are appropriate when they serve to restore or maintain the integrity of the professional atmosphere.
Public Criticism Encounters	Frustration, General discomfort	Scolding, Detachment	Professionals should display a calm and controlled demeanor when faced with public criticism.

Their frustration stemmed from trying to engage others in forward-moving conversations that were not willing to compromise or consider different perspectives. In these conversations, representatives struggled to move their conversations with others beyond pre-existing differences. For example, an NGO representative described being frustrated when her expectations were violated in a conversation with a Navy representative by what she perceived as them ignoring her attempts at meaningful dialogue. Leading up this emotional moment, she had sought to engage in a conversation with them on her concerns with the scientific evidence used to support the agency's proposed training activity. She explains her difficulty in engaging in the conversation she desired:

> And there was one part where we were talking about right whales and they had some marine mammals specialists and I was … you know they were saying this isn't going to harm them you know for these various reasons and I was trying to engage with them about you know well, that's not true if you look at the science and the definition of harm under the Endangered Species Act and how does this really comport with what we have just said about right whales that it just won't take you know removal of one adult or even one juvenile whale could jeopardize the continued existence, you know how does all this comport and you know they were just kind of sticking to the party line and not really willing to engage with me about any of the possibilities, the limitations, the … understanding you know things like that. So, you know I found it to be a very frustrating and difficult conversation… I just expected more honesty and more concern about the resources and the diversity of needs than were being presented there.

For this NGO representative, moving forward on the issue in conversation meant being able to explore new perspectives or receive validation for her concerns from the Navy representative. She became frustrated when the Navy representative violated her expectations of covering new ground in conversations.

"Exploration" was a key term associated with representatives' frustration during emotional moments of violated expectations. A common problem was a lack of exploration of different or nuanced positions that other representatives might adopt as a result of new information shared within the conversation. Common in these moments

were representatives' frustrations with others who were not responsive to these explorative attempts. One representative's frustration stemmed from his inability to forge common ground in conversations with the Navy on a particularly contentious topic regarding conducting the geographical location and seasonality of training activities. After having participated in a series of difficult conversations on the topic, he expected some sort of progress to be made. Yet he found a familiar pattern to perpetuate differences among positions and interests, where his side would explain the need for seasonal and geographical closures, and the Navy would counter with justification for why they could not do what the NGOs wanted them to do. His frustration stemmed from experiencing unresponsive representatives in conversations, which he likened to "beat[ing] our heads against the wall."

This type of emotional moment was managed by the performance of a neutral demeanor. Representatives created a neutral demeanor by using (1) emotional detachment and (2) indirect expression. *Emotional detachment* is an emotional management strategy where workers let emotional triggers "roll off their backs" so they can continue displaying a neutral and calm demeanor (Stenross & Kleinman, 1989). Detachment serves individuals during difficult moments by enabling them to resist being "sucked in" by others in the workplace (Tracy, 2004). By detaching personally from the emotional moment, representatives sought to engage conversations through a more "objective" lens rather than become emotionally embroiled in them.

A Commission representative explained his use and the importance of emotional detachment to manage his frustration in such an objective way. In his violated

expectations moment, he described being frustrated that representatives with conflicting perspectives were not willing to compromise or consider new perspectives in order to make progress in the conversation. He said,

> Often times you spend in your mind a lot of time doing this really rapid search for how do I clarify this issue so that we can make progress, rather than just let it continue on as a debate that's really not going anywhere? …We have to think about how are we going to move the whole area [on the issue] forward, and that means being a lot cooler and calmer and trying to be careful about making sure that you've clarified the issues really well, that you have a sense of where you need to go to resolve them over time. And otherwise, if you don't do that, you just get too frustrated. It takes a lot of patience, really.

This example shows how the representative sought to stay emotionally detached from the conflict presented by being in a frustrating conversation that wasn't making progress. Emotional detachment enabled him to adopt an "objective" lens so that he could stay on task with clarifying the issue at the center of the debate that was stalling progress in the conversation.

Emotional detachment also enabled representatives to treat violated expectations emotional moments as a routine aggravation in their job. One NGO representative described her emotional detachment strategy to managing such a "routine aggravation" that arose in a settlement meeting conversation with the Navy. She had attended the

meeting the Navy had invited her to under the premise that the Navy was interested in working out agreement on a proposed training range and avoiding litigation. Those expectations were violated in conversation with Navy representatives she perceived as unwilling to consider her perspective and interested only in getting her and other NGO representatives to change their minds. By emotionally detaching from the moment, she described being able to treat the violated expectations as routine and focus her energies in more productive ways, like crafting a winning legal case against those who violated her conversation expectations:

> This isn't something that I would take personally. I think it's part and parcel of the territory in which I work, which is we work on very controversial issues…it doesn't make me angry…We're just going to do what we're going to do. If you're going to say we're not going to help you guys at all, then OK, we'll file our case. I'm not going to argue with you about it on the phone.

Frustration was also managed professionally through a strategy of indirect expression. *Indirect expression* is an emotional management strategy where representatives conveyed frustration to others during violated expectations emotional moments without actually coming out and stating their feelings directly, reminiscent of the saying, "saying something without actually saying it." Instead, they expressed themselves nonverbally; examples of which included expressing how one feels through body language and voice tone. This strategy enabled representatives to control their

frustration in what they deemed a professional way, while also feeling like they made their feelings known by hinting to the objects of their frustration.

For example, one participant described how she employed the indirect expression strategy when she became frustrated in conversation with other NGO representatives who were not willing to show compromise in their extreme positions against Navy training. She described feeling it was her responsibility to maintain the professional atmosphere in which they conversed by reserving her direct expression of frustration for when she was in private. In the moment, she rather channeled this frustration in comments to the group such as "Come on guys, we are not getting in where we need to, we need to do something, we need to turn up with some compromise." She was sure others could perceive her frustration when chiding them of the need to move forward. Another representative dealing with frustration over a similarly stagnant conversation employed indirect expression by changing his tone to convey his frustration. Although he never came out and said he was frustrated with others, he felt confident he conveyed his frustration to others by talking faster and emphasizing his words more. He felt such a strategy enabled him to communicate his frustration without getting angry. He equated the use of this strategy with treating others with respect in a professional setting.

One interpretation of the communication rule suggested in these violated expectations emotional moments is: Professionals should maintain a neutral demeanor in unproductive conversations amongst themselves. Heated and contentious conversations do happen in professional atmospheres but respect and courtesy should persist even when professionals are dissatisfied with the direction or outcome of conversations. The

restraint of negative emotional display in favor of expressing courtesy and politeness is called editing (Kasouf, Celuch, & Bantham, 2006). Representatives edit their emotional display because they consider a professional limit to the amount of arguing that should take place in conversations. For example, when representatives reached a point at which they cannot have productive conversations, arguing should move to the legal arena, a mediated context where a judge can control disagreement by imposing his/her own decision.

Personal Attacks

A personal attack moment occurred when representatives needed to manage their anger or irritation when they are personally criticized or bullied in conversation. For personal criticism, representatives often voiced anger or irritation when being personally criticized which stemmed from having their motives questioned. One representative described it this way: "We're directing the attention to really be substance of the issue and sometimes the exchanges can get heated if someone is suggesting some form of improper motive or deceit or whatever, I mean those such things just become quite personal. They're questioning the sole integrity and things like that… occasionally some comments will get under my skin." Questioning another's motives was considered personal attacks because representatives felt their professional reputations were being threatened. In one instance, a Navy representative described her anger with her reputation being threatened in a conversation with NGO representatives, who discredited her efforts to engage in open dialogue by reporting her to her superiors.

Emotional moments associated with personal attacks also stemmed from being bullied or harassed by other representatives during conversation. Making aggressive comments that were critical of individuals, rather than their positions on the issue, constituted what representatives perceived as personal attacks from bullying. In the following example, a representative recalls observing another representative bully a more junior representative at a meeting among the organizations. In the excerpt, the representative describes her perceptions of the bully's actions:

> [The bully]'s got anger management problems, he's a dick. And I had zero tolerance for that. So we ended up having quite the adversarial relationship. [The bully] was being super aggressive to the [junior] rep…And she's not timid or anything, but you know, she's not Brunehilde or anybody so she, he was freaking her out. He was stressing her out. He would just say, you know, "I don't understand what your problem is!" And he'd just be yelling at her.

Interacting with such bullies was challenging because representatives felt "belligerent" individuals had anger management problems. This representative distinguished her behavior as a professional in comparison to such bullies: "When I get angry in a professional setting, I don't lose my temper. That's what the person I'm facing is doing. They're losing their temper, which by definition is unprofessional. And I'm capable of getting angry without losing my temper."

Personal criticism attached to these behaviors was considered an attack because it focused on an individual rather than the individual's position on the issue. Personal attacks were considered unprofessional and posed a challenge to having productive conversations about substantive issues. Whether having one's motives questioned, reputation threatened or being bullied, the salience of these personal attacks to representatives appeared to be related to the violation of some personal boundary in a professional setting. This was evidenced in the way that representatives spoke of respect in conjunction with these attacks, the need to show professional respect by not crossing a certain boundary in how one treated others when they took issue with their positions on the issue. When representatives described their encounters with personal attacks in conversations, they noted the inappropriateness and unfairness of professionals making personal comments. In conversations with these individuals, representatives felt challenged by conversations that veered off track from issue-based discussions into personal territory, which suggests that personal comments are not considered helpful to representatives' idea of productivity. Common among these moments was representatives' desire to move conversations back on track towards more productive conversations. Those committing personal attacks needed to be "reigned in."

In this type of emotional moment, representatives maintained a neutral demeanor by using strategies of (1) emotional detachment and (2) scolding. As discussed early, by detaching personally in the emotional moment, representatives tried to resist taking the emotional bait and "keep it cool." One representative described how resisting emotional bait reminded him of a challenge in parenting and that he tapped into his parenting skills

in these moments because such personal comments were considered toxic to productive conversations. Emotional detachment came in the form of not responding to attacking comments or responding in way that focused on the issue rather than the attacking comments that were made. The process of using this strategy in response to a personal attack by a belligerent and aggressive individual was described this way: "You're trying to be firm but not engage on that personal level…I'm trying to get somewhat more emotionally detached… a little emotional detachment is going to manage the feelings and try to keep on task…" Thus, representatives aimed to maintain a calm, task-focused stance on the conversation. They received aid from others present in conversations in dealing with "belligerent" representations making personal attacks, with help to steer the conversation back to the issue.

Representatives also used a *scolding* strategy in the form of confronting others with the inappropriateness of their behavior. Scolding came in various forms. Some would ask attackers for apologies when scolding them for the inappropriateness of their remarks amid conversations. For example, a representative who felt another's personal attack unfairly questioned her sincere motives, scolded while seeking an apology in the following way: she asked them why they had attacked her, scolded them for attacking her personally based on assumptions of some evil intent behind her actions, and asked for an apology. For her, seeking an apology after the personal attack was a matter of principle.

Others used humor to make fun of the attackers when scolding them. For example, after witnessing a representative personally attack another, this representative used humor to scold him, as she describes:

> He was stressing her out. He would just say, you know, I don't understand what your problem is. And he'd just be yelling at her…And so I basically was just starting to try to control [him]… And so I would just do stuff like he would have a meltdown, and I would be like well, not that it isn't entertaining to just sit here and listen to [him] rant and rave, but can we move on? You know? And everybody just started laughing, and [he] would just sit there fuming. But he'd shut up.

This excerpt shows how the representative used humor to confront another about the inappropriateness of their personal attacking behavior. By scolding the attacker through humor, the attacker became the focus of a joke in front of an audience. This strategy succeeded in controlling the personal attack emotional moment because it got the attacker to "shut up."

One interpretation of the communication rule suggested for managing these personal attack emotional moments is: Displays of negative emotion are appropriate when they serve to restore or maintain the integrity of the professional atmosphere. Professionals have a responsibility to monitor and protect the collective safety in conversations. This means that a personal attack against oneself or another threatens this

safety and needs to be subdued. This is evidenced in the way that personal attacks not directed at oneself were still described by representatives where they felt compelled to take action to restore the integrity of the conversation. In these moments, an appropriate display of negative emotions such as anger is to confront the individual threatening the safety of the conversation with the result of ending the attack. Because the moment evolves from a generally unacceptable debate tactic, which is attacking people not the problem (Fisher & Ury, 2011), displaying negative emotion helps someone assume a supervisory or leadership position in the conversation and take charge to protect from future threats. One representative reminded an attacker about acceptable debate tactics to hopefully alter their behavior: "If your counterpart feels that they can get somewhere by bullying, standing up to them can avoid that from occurring down the line."

Public Criticism Encounters

At certain times, difficult conversations among the representatives were open to the public which offered the public the opportunity to make comments to the representatives. Other times representatives of decision making agencies engaged directly with the public as they expressed their concerns or asked questions about proposals. In both settings, a criticism encounter moment occurred when representatives were uncomfortable or frustrated when encountering public criticism in conversations.

The public that may be present at these conversations includes other organizational representatives as well as private citizens. This emotional moment is the only one identified that specifically referred to public settings, which means it is also the one type where citizens were part of conversations. Regardless of whether the critics

were citizens or not, representatives characterized criticism encounter as emotional moments which involved individuals of different status in conversations. They perceived a divide between decision-makers or representatives who were insiders privy to a seat at the decision-making table given their key stakes in the issue, and the public who were outsiders to the decision-making process. One representative described her observations of this divide in criticism encounters as: "It's pretty amazing to watch the faces of the various [representatives], some who were very uncomfortable because they don't like listening to the public like that… They feel like their time is being wasted…but I always felt like this is the public that you are treating like, you know, you're not the aristocrats." When describing their encounters with public criticism, the interview data did not suggest that representatives differentiated in their experiences whether the criticism came from a citizen or organizational representative.

Representatives' feelings of discomfort and frustration stemmed from trying to engage stakeholders whose criticism made it more difficult for them to carry out their organizational duties during these public conversations. These duties included informing the public of decisions or reaching some agreement with other representatives during these public conversations. In either case, representatives struggled when confronted with a "shooting gallery" of angry or antagonistic stakeholders. They felt frustrated by these encounters when their organization's policy dictated they remain silent in response. A Navy representative elaborated on this difficulty he experienced: "I remember the most difficult thing for me as a naval officer was not being allowed to respond to the criticism or comment of the general public...it was a good deal difficult to

remain silent as the protocol demanded as the public expressed their views as how they perceived the issue."

Sometimes, representatives felt frustrated because they felt the criticism was inappropriate. Public criticism was described as inappropriate when unrealistic demands were made that interfered with others' ability to learn about the issue, because learning, not venting, was seen as the purpose of settings such as public meetings. They also felt frustrated when they faced criticism that they did not find relevant to the technical information they wished to discuss. In describing such inappropriate display of criticism, one NGO representative explained that such behavior warranted moving representatives' conversations out of the public's view:

> The purpose of these meetings is to learn or to ask questions and things. To demand is not the purpose of the meetings. The people who have the capacity to make the change, and the people who have rational understanding of the situation and facts should be able to meet in a way that exchanges information that's helpful to both sides…If somebody… demands that they be heard and their demands are simply interfering or they are unrealistic or they are too loud to disrupt or whatever then in that case I support finding a way for the people who can actually get to the substance of the matter in a professional and a responsible way. I support them finding a way to meet actually in closed doors or do it later.

Interestingly, not all representatives felt such critical venting was inappropriate. To some, it was seen as vitally important to the integrity of agency officials' work and their decisions. For example, a Coastal Commission representative explained that it was important that the public be able to vent their criticism at agency officials in an open public process because the opportunity for public interaction, even if emotionally-charged, fulfilled the agency's transparency requirement and served as evidence that agencies did not have hidden agendas.

In this type of emotional moment, representatives displayed their frustration or discomfort through the management strategies of: (1) scolding and (2) emotional detachment. Some representatives scolded critics who they felt blocked them from having productive conversations with decision-making representatives because of unreasonable or inappropriate comments. Scolding aimed to remind individuals about what was considered acceptable and useful contributions to conversations and in doing so, define parameters for what representatives would and would not tolerate in how criticism was communicated. One representative described his scolding strategy towards someone making inappropriate criticisms:

> Somebody with this approach is obviously negative, they are not open to comment, they want to make their comment. Their comment is unrealistic, they have this demand that you are hearing. …They are in my way, I will try to shut them up or I will even make fun of them. I will side with somebody else, with the [decision-making representative] that I am standing with, I will just say I

don't think your comments are appropriate. It's not going to work here… they are getting in the way of a learning experience.

Representatives also used an emotional detachment strategy. They were keenly aware of their job to represent their organization and follow the guidelines of their organization regarding how they should manage themselves as professionals when faced with public criticism. Being able to fulfill their organization's expectations for professional conduct meant being able to resist responding to the events unfolding around them. For example, Navy representatives referenced guidelines that dictated that they "stick to the facts," educate with information, and stay quiet. Following these guidelines meant detaching from their frustration or discomfort to maintain an appearance of objectivity, as described here:

> There's a lot of things folks, public person coming in there just doesn't know and so they may be lashing out at you, and if someone lashes out on you, you tend to get defensive. And in this scenario you don't want to get into that he said, she said defensive thing, you have to back off and say, "Okay wait, my role is to educate, it's not to get an argument with this person"…there might be people who just say, "My God I'm going to be here to stand up and make claims and things like that." You just have to be sensitive to that, I guess, try to educate and be open. On the other hand you're like, "My God, I'm just trying to get this done. Why do I have to worry about all this touchy feeling stuff, I just want to

get this thing done." But then you have to recognize, "Is this part of getting it done?"

Another representative described it this way: "Sometimes, people will get angry and walk away. So it is our responsibility to really just keep quiet and, to just relay the facts and the information as they are in our opinion. At times it feels a little frustrating." Representatives described their difficulty in these moments due to not being able to engage or not knowing how, within the policies of their organization.

One interpretation of the communication rule for managing criticism encounter emotional moments is: Professionals should display a calm and controlled demeanor when faced with public criticism. Professionals have a responsibility to keep conversations task-focused. To that end they need to refrain from becoming personally affected by criticism received from the public. This means detaching themselves personally from any automatic reactions to criticism and refraining from the kinds of emotion displays that are being displayed to them by the public. Such stoic display reinforces professionals' positions as insiders to the decision-making process; privilege they derive from their organizational affiliation: "I'm trying to represent [my organization], I've worked for [my organization] for over 30 years, it's a professional organization, and anyone that represents it should act professional. You're comfortable with the material…and you should never have to get openly frustrated." Even if they are not representatives of a decision making agency, a calm display is a signal to others that

they have a seat with the "in crowd" at the decision making table and understand the rules governing their continued presence at the table.

Discussion

This study explored representatives' display and management of emotions during interorganizational conversations pertaining to the Navy-marine mammal issue. In identifying the display of emotions as a challenge to representatives, my analysis found that representatives employ particular emotion management strategies in a variety of emotional moments encountered during interorganizational conversations. A typology consisting of three types of emotional moments was developed: (1) violated expectations, (2) personal attacks, and (3) criticism encounters. Representatives used detachment, scolding, and indirect expression to manage these emotional moments, which were informed by communication rules that centered on the performance of professionalism. Three major implications emerge from this analysis centering on the relationship between professionalism and emotional moments, the centrality of negative emotion in emotional moments, and the relationship between emotional management strategies and the perceived intensity of emotional moments.

Professionalism Informs Emotional Display and Management

My findings suggest that professionalism exercises a strong influence on the way that organizational representatives experience and manage emotional moments in interorganizational conversations. Previous organizational research has recognized organizational norms as largely influencing how members manage emotions in organizations (Fineman, 2000; Waldron, 2012) and that this is supplemented by drawing

on implicit knowledge or unwritten rules of professionalism in these settings (Kramer & Hess, 2002; Larsson, 2014; Lively, 2000; Smith & Kleinman, 1989). My findings suggest that professional norms are a particularly important reference point for representatives from different organizations as they manage emotional moments. Representatives managed emotional moments by emphasizing professionalism, which served as an overarching set of norms that transcended organizational norms and provided general guidance on emotion display common across organizations.

The notion of professionalism has been widely debated, but there is agreement that professionalism is a form of control over workers in an occupation that is socially constructed and contextually enacted (Gleeson, Davies, & Wheeler, 2005; Holyrod, 2000). Acting "professionally" has been explained as a standard of service or practice provided on the job (Hoyle, 2001; Sockett, 1996). Indeed, Grey (1998) argues professionalism has more to do with one's conduct than one's technical expertise or qualifications, since the latter is often a given as evidenced by one's ability to secure their position.

My findings suggest the importance of professionalism as an enacted practice, versus simply a theoretical construct (Evans, 2008). Enacted professionalism captures the behavior and practices displayed by representatives who are "being professional" (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Representatives needn't necessarily fit the common picture of a professional in order for their conduct to qualify as professionalism since Cheney and Ashcraft argue that their reference to professional norms suggests that they strove for their conduct to meet professional ideals. This study's insight into the importance of

professionalism in emotional moments addresses Cheney and Ashcraft's (2007) call for communication scholars to examine the concrete local experiences of workers who strive for professional conduct.

The communication rules suggested by my analysis indicate representatives are more attuned to professional expectations than organizational norms for managing emotion. One possible explanation for this could be that enacting the role of a professional is more beneficial to them in interorganizational conversations than adhering solely to their role as organizational members. Engaging with their professional identity may provide them the flexibility to develop a common code of conduct with representatives from other organizations that paves the way for potential positive working relationships in the future. Previously scholars have noted that in interorganizational settings, representatives perform boundary spanning roles when they encounter those with different organizational norms for managing emotion (Waldron, 2012). As boundary spanners, representatives need to follow organizational norms for behavior while at the same time seeking potential collaborative conversations with others in order to move the issue forward. This can be difficult as interacting with others means boundary spanners risk encountering the unfamiliar and competing organizational norms of other representatives (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

It may be that representatives who adhere too tightly to organizational norms may find their organizationally-driven behavior too restrictive for developing connections with others in the diverse settings in which they interact. In contrast, professional norms have been identified as more universally relevant across occupations

(Lively, 2000). Those norms would therefore offer representatives more flexibility to establish connections with others. Establishing this common standard and displaying the basic niceties of courtesy and respect through these initial connections lays the groundwork for positive working relationships to develop among them. Representatives tend to experience emotionally-charged conversations negatively, and so one way that representatives can demonstrate professional courtesy and mutual respect is by adopting a common code of conduct regarding emotion display that controls the environment of interorganizational conversations in a way that minimizes encounters with strong emotions for everyone's comfort.

The findings suggest that as representatives come to respect each other as professionals, they are more likely to develop positive working relationships with each other. For example, a NGO representative indicated she had no desire to work with an Navy representative she viewed to have anger management issues on the basis that she did not see him as a professional. Such a loss of relational potential as this describes is unfortunate, because identifying collaborative solutions to environmental conflicts like the Navy-marine mammal issue necessitate carving creative agreements with the chiseling-power of positive working relationships. This suggests that being more attuned to professional norms of emotion display poses relational benefits to representatives.

The typology of emotional moments provides further insight into the hidden construction of the amorphous workplace ideal of professionalism; namely, that performing neutrality is an important component of enacting professionalism. Displaying a neutral demeanor accomplishes the task of presenting an image of one's

self as calm, cool and collected even while surrounding contexts may be contentious; an important task that enables organizational members to uphold their organization's emotional norms (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998; Hardy et al., 1998; Hayes & Metts, 2008). Previous research on environmental conflicts has documented what was observed in this study; namely the high value associated with decision-makers appearing calm and objective in comparison to their "emotional" public counterparts (Cox, 2013; Satterfield, 2002; Senecah, 2004; Vining & Tyler, 1999). Showing a neutral demeanor enables decision-makers to maintain their status as authority figures because acting calm and composed lends credibility to their supposed capability of making rational and unbiased decisions and thus reinforces their position of authority over the public. My findings extend our insight into the realm of interorganizational conversations by suggesting that representatives associated high value with performing neutrality because it shows other professionals their ability to contribute to the "rational" atmosphere of their discussions on contentious issues. Representatives perform neutrality in interorganizational settings not to reinforce their authority in conversations but rather to maintain their legitimacy as objective and productive contributors to these conversations.

Regardless of public or private context, representatives are concerned with being calm and collected in conversations that take place on the issue. These conversations give representatives access to key representatives of the organizations involved; they are very much where the action on the issue takes place. In interorganizational conversations, representatives not only pursue their organizations' goals, they also pursue the collective aim of doing their jobs. To be successful in their work on the issue,

representatives need to be able to secure agreements and solutions despite their differences in emotionally-charged difficult conversations. By presenting a neutral demeanor, representatives display their ability to put aside emotion for the sake of seeking objective and unbiased solutions and agreements. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) have previously noted this ability to conduct ones job with a rational orientation free from personal bias, as a key component of professionalism.

This rationality is prized by representatives who see having to encounter strong emotions as barriers to moving conversations forward towards agreements because they threaten to derail conversations. In contrast, when representatives display a neutral demeanor, conversations are not challenged by the presence of strong emotions and representatives feel more in control of the direction that conversations take. Representatives expect each other to contribute to maintaining such a calm and controlled environment Thus, being seen as a professional serves an important function in interorganizational conversations, because beyond fulfilling their organization's expectations in these settings, representatives want to be taken seriously by others in conversations regarding the Navy-marine mammal issue. In order to be taken seriously as productive contributors in these conversations, they convey "rational" behavior that is suggested when one appears calm and collected.

Emotional Moments are Characterized by Negative Emotions

Organizational representatives characterize emotional moments with a negative valence. This was evidenced by representatives' tendency to perceive emotional moments as consisting of strong negative emotions including anger and frustration that

served as barriers to performing their jobs. Emotion is not only a challenge to rational decision making in decision maker-citizen conversations, it is also a challenge to the context of interorganizational representative-representative conversations (McComas, 2003; Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013).

On one hand, the finding that negative emotions are associated with emotional moments seems intuitive given that emotional moments were encountered in difficult conversations and the interview questions framed these phenomena as "difficult." When individuals face difficulty in achieving their goals and interacting with others, it is easy to see how they might perceive and respond to those situations in a negative manner. On the other hand, just because a conversation is difficult does not mean it cannot also be associated with positive emotions. Difficult conversations may also be fun, engaging, or exciting. For example, a debate about politics may be experienced by some as an enjoyable and spirited exchange of ideas. Given that difficulty can be associated with both positive and negative emotions, the question becomes why it is in this context that negative emotions are associated with emotional moments.

One possible explanation is that the emotionality of difficult conversations reflects the values and beliefs of the professional culture associated with the topics being discussed. In the case of the Navy-marine mammal issue, an emphasis on rationality pervaded representatives' discussions because scientific process and scientifically-produced knowledge in the forms of facts and data is the preferred epistemology in environmental conflicts (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013) Though challenges to reaching agreement on the complex issue often emerged by virtue of the diverse

organizational perspectives represented in conversations, these conversations were perceived to be relatively easy to manage because discussions could focus on scientific evidence and objective facts. Scientists emphasize the pursuit of decisions free from the sway of emotion and personal bias, though some scientists do argue complete avoidance of bias is impossible (Rose & Parsons, 2015). As a result, science is perceived to be a neutral authority in determining the best solutions to problems (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013) while emotion is often viewed as a threat to problem solving that must be overcome.

Influenced by the scientific culture permeating discussions on the Navy-marine mammal issue, conversations that grappled with biases and subjective interests and involved emotionally-charged discussions were viewed as relatively difficult. Because difficult conversations involved emotional concerns, and emotionality is viewed negatively according to scientific values, representatives experienced difficult conversations as unwelcome and taxing challenges to overcome. The negative emotionality of difficult conversations would then mirror the negative view of emotions as interfering in rational discussions that is represented by scientific values.

Strategy Depends on Perceived Emotional Intensity

My findings suggest that the emotion management strategies used by organizational representatives depend on the perceived intensity of emotional moments. Emotional detachment was commonly used across all three types of emotional moments. In light of previous research on workplace emotion noting a pejorative view towards emotion in organizations (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Obling, 2013; Waldron, 2000), it

makes sense that detachment would be a popular strategy across emotional moments as it provides a strategy for organizational representatives to physically and mentally distance themselves from emotional situations. Traditional approaches to organizing privilege the control and order associated with rationality and shun emotion for its unpredictability and ambiguity (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). The emphasis on rationality is likely passed down to organizational members given the heavy influence of organizational norms on individual communication (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998; Hardy et al., 1998).

However, the more active strategy of scolding was only employed in both personal attacks and public criticism encounters, implying these two types of emotional moments somehow differ from violated expectations emotional moments. One explanation for this pattern is that personal attacks and public criticism encounters can be viewed as moments when representatives encounter strong face threats. "Face" refers to the self-image we want others to see while "facework" are the communicative efforts we take to uphold this self-identify in front of others (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Personal attacks represent strong face threats because individuals are being personally criticized and become the focus of the conversation rather than substantive issues. In public criticism encounters, it is the act of being criticized in front of the public, versus among colleagues behind closed doors that initiates a face threat. In both types of moments, individuals' professional identities are threatened in front of those they would want to maintain dignity.

Irizarry (2004) observes that one aspect of professionalism is to actively seek to maintain one's professional face, which requires professionals to maintain a calm neutral demeanor. My research extends this idea by suggesting that the performance of calm neutral demeanor may be supplemented by other emotion management strategies depending on the level of face threat. Emotional detachment represents a baseline for managing emotions in difficult conversation as being more neutral and objective is one way to enact professionalism and is consistent with professional expectations associated with the scientific community. Whether the face threat is weak or strong, professionals seem to perceive that maintaining an objective perspective is important so they can experience conflicts as observers rather than to be personally taken up by them. As an observer to conflict, professionals perceive themselves to be more in control of their ability to do their job according to workplace norms in conversations, which is consistent with previous research involving medical students (Stenross & Kleinman, 1989) and police officers (Pogrebin & Poole, 1991). However, additional strategies such as scolding may become employed when the face threat is strong.

While this research highlights maintaining professional standards as an individual task, my findings extend our insight into the realm of interorganizational conversations by suggesting it is also a collective task. Representatives employ active strategies such as scolding for the collective benefit of preserving the professional atmosphere of interorganizational conversations.

Future Research

The findings of this research suggest several avenues ripe for future research. One potential area for exploration is the role of context in the experience and management of emotional moments. Friedman's (1994) work on labor negotiations suggests that the context of contentious conversations among conflicting parties is key to understanding how they move forward towards agreement. In his research, when negotiators interact in the public's view, they perform the role of being a "tough negotiator" in order to appear to be taking a hard stance and fight for their organization's interests. These "tough negotiators" interact in private more cooperatively; free from their need to perform in public, they may more freely explore compromise or collaborative solutions that are acceptable to both sides, instead of the "winner takes all" mentality that pervades public settings. Indeed, representatives interviewed in this study often described their conversations similarly as negotiations, as suggested by their use of terms such as "parties," "win," and "got a good deal." Friedman's description of "table-pounders," negotiators who perform emotionally charged behaviors when negotiating in public, is reminiscent of the "table bangers" described in the interview data. While this study focused on articulating the qualities of emotional moments in difficult conversations, we need to explore further how contextual factors such as the private-public dimension may influence the experience and management of emotional moments.

A second area for future research is to explore how professionals manage the rationality-emotionality duality. As various scholars studying emotion have argued (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Cass &Walker, 2009), conversations and situations are

comprised of interacting rational and emotional elements. In the current study, there is a strong duality between rationality and emotionality, with rationality being dominant and viewed as an interactional ideal. This duality may be attributed to organizational and occupational identities that these professionals assume that emphasize the importance of making decisions in environmental conflicts based on scientific evidence. In other professions such as nursing, family therapy, and teaching which also emphasize the importance of cultivating good relationships and positive emotions with patients, clients, and students, the balance of this duality between rationality and emotionality may be different. Therefore, future research should examine how different kinds of occupations and topics may influence how professionals manage the relationship between rationality and emotionality.

A third area of research may focus on the way that organizational representative may engaged in collective facework. Rossing and Scott (2014) propose collective facework in which "members of a group perceive a threat to their shared face and use tacitly agreed upon strategies to avert this danger" (p. 169). The present study focuses on the way that individual organizational representatives managed their face during emotional moments using emotional detachment, scolding, and indirect expression. However, conversations are jointly constructed between individuals and the performance of a particular strategy does not it mean will be adopted wholesale by the other. Future research needs to examine how individuals collectively create face within professional settings—how such strategies are initiated, what factors facilitate or inhibit their uptake, and how the strategies are negotiated over time.

This study provided further insight into an organizational view of emotion in environmental conflicts. It proposed three types of emotional moments in which representatives experienced and managed emotion according to communication rules for professional emotion display. In doing so, this study generated key insights regarding professionalism, negative emotionality, and perceived intensity of emotional encounters. These three areas of insight highlight potential avenues for further exploring an organizational perspective of emotion in environmental conflicts.

CHAPTER IV

MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Overview

This chapter focuses on the difficult conversations that may emerge in sensitive organizational research settings among engaged scholars and non-academic practitioners and highlights concrete researcher practices for managing them. It explores researcher-participant conversations that emerged over the course of a case study of a controversy regarding Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals. The data was collected from semi-structured interviews with representatives of key organizations involved in this issue, field notes/journals of the research process and email correspondence with the participants. The analysis identified six challenges to scholar-practitioner conversations regarding: (1) organizational access, (2) interview confidentiality-disclosure, (3) maintaining neutrality, (4) facilitating disclosure, (5) construct resonance, and (6) analysis confidentiality-disclosure. A set of ten situated strategies associated with developing systemic relational connections between engaged scholars and participants and gaining and sustaining organizational access were employed to manage these challenges. These findings suggest that situated judgment and an emphasis on research context are key considerations for engaged scholars in undertaking engaged organizational research in sensitive settings.

Introduction

Engaged scholarship is an approach to organizational communication research and practice that emphasizes addressing pressing practical problems through scholarly inquiry in collaborative relationships with non-academic practitioners (Dempsey & Barge, 2014). Engaged organizational communication scholars have addressed a number of pressing social and organizational issues such as safety culture in security sensitive organizations (Barbour & Gill, 2014), the organizational culture of wildland firefighting (Thackaberry, 2004) and organizational change initiatives in the public sector (McPherson & Deetz, 2005).

Scholars and researchers have tackled a number of important concerns regarding the conduct of engaged scholarship such as ethics (Cheney, 2008), academic institutional constraints (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008), and the characteristics that define high quality engaged work (Simpson & Seibold, 2008).

Engaged organizational communication scholarship calls into question what it means for academic researchers to manage the challenging relationships between academic researchers and non-academic practitioners. Dempsey and Barge (2014) highlight three key tensions that organizational scholars must navigate when conducting engaged scholarship: (1) representation-intervention, (2) distance-empathy, and (3) the scholar-practitioner role. Managing these tensions requires developing a concrete set of responses and situated practices that allow researchers to manage these tensions successfully when engaging with organizations and nonacademic practitioners. The need to develop local situated research practices to further engaged scholarship is

highlighted by Barge and Shockley-Zalabak (2008): "The issue is what we are willing to do in our professional lives… to move engaged scholarship from the realm of good intentions and dreams to concrete embodied practice" (p. 262).

Conducting engaged scholarship requires researchers to navigate a set of complex and difficult conversations with nonacademic practitioners and partners. The purpose of this study is to build on Dempsey and Barge's (2014) call for developing situated research practices that facilitate researchers managing the various tensions, problems, and challenges that emerge when conducting engaged organizational communication scholarship. Previous research has generally discussed the challenges and dilemmas associated with conducting engaged scholarship. This study empirically examines the challenges encountered when conducting engaged scholarship and the concrete strategies that engaged scholars may use to manage them.

The research question that informs this study is, "What are the situated challenges associated with engaged researcher-participant relationships and conversations and what strategies do researchers use to manage them?" I begin by reviewing the characteristics of an engaged scholarship approach and provide a foundation for understanding the management of researcher-participant relationships and conversations. Relevant work on reflexivity and sensitivity in research is reviewed to provide context for the current project. I then describe the methods I used to document and analyze the challenges I encountered during the research process as an engaged scholar followed by a discussion of the results and implications emerging from my analysis.

Reflexivity and the Challenges of Conducting Engaged Scholarship

Engaged scholarship has enjoyed increasing attention among communication scholars, in part, due to a growing recognition that research endeavors should engage in studying practical problems with those who have community and organizational interests at stake, and for the purpose of generating useful knowledge (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Putnam & Dempsey, 2015). Though engaged scholars will always encounter some challenges in managing the differences regarding values and expectations associated between academic and nonacademic communities of practice, the challenges may become heightened when engaging with highly sensitive research topics that are "hot" due to the social and political environment. As a result, engaged scholars may confront unique challenges to the co-production of knowledge which are especially salient in sensitive research settings. I begin by highlighting the relationships among engaged scholarship and collaborative research practice and then connect engaged scholarship with sensitive research settings.

Engaged Scholarship, Collaborative Inquiry, and Reflexive Practice

Engaged scholarship is a research approach that focuses on "fostering participative modes of scholarly inquiry that meaningfully address practical concerns" (Dempsey & Barge, 2014, p. 669). These research endeavors respond to and generate useful knowledge for organizational and community stakeholders faced with pressing challenges. Putnam and Dempsey (2015) highlight five different types or "faces" of engaged scholarship: (1) applied communication research, where the goal is to generate useable knowledge that serves community members, (2) collaborative learning research,

where the focus is on scholars and communities learning together to manage community problems, (3) activism and social justice research, that emphasizes transformation and action on issues of social relevance (Seibold, 2005), (4) practical theory, which pursues engaged scholarship as a theory building endeavor, and (5) public scholarship, which documents efforts in higher education to foster civic engagement within communities. Despite these different "faces" of engaged scholarship, they share three common interests: (a) devoting academic research towards addressing practical problems in order to generate useful knowledge (Boyer, 1996; Dempsey & Barge, 2014), (b) maintaining the standards of rigorous research methods while also bridging the gap between theory and practice (Simpson & Seibold, 2008), and (c) sustaining collaborative relationships with participants that foster co-production and co-ownership of generated knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007).

The focus of this study centers on one "face" of engaged scholarship, collaborative learning, with its emphasis on actively engaging nonacademic practitioners in the co-production of knowledge (Barge & Schockley-Zalabak, 2008). Of all of Putnam and Dempsey's (2015) faces of engaged scholarship, collaborative learning takes on issues of the co-production of knowledge between researchers and non-academic practitioners most explicitly. Participants become "co-researchers" that shape process design and practical decisions together with their academic counterparts (Van de Ven, 2007). From this perspective, engaged scholarship becomes "a participative form of research for obtaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders (researchers, users, clients, sponsors and practitioners) in studying complex problems" (Van de Ven,

2007, p. 9). Detailed definitions of this research approach, including its historical foundation are available elsewhere (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Van de Ven, 2007).

Collaborative learning is distinguished from other types of engaged scholarship by its emphasis on developing connection among co-researchers on issues regarding expertise and difference, relationships, reflexivity, conversation, and theory-practice integration. Researchers and non-academic practitioners' different forms of expertise yield divergent perspectives on what counts as useful knowledge and varied expectations of the research process; collaborative research seeks to preserve these multiple voices (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Putnam & Dempsey, 2015; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). As a result, emergent collaborative researcher-participant relationships resemble partnerships where knowledge is co-produced and the research process co-owned as co-researchers work closely together over a time, adapting and responding to their diverse project needs, (Boyer, 1996; Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Van de Ven, 2007). The co-production of knowledge emphasizes reflexivity in that knowledge is continuously folded upon itself and reconsidered in light of the varied expertise of collaborators (Stohl, 2005). The product of this research can be viewed as a conversation integrating theory and practice for generating learning that addresses both academic and non-academic concerns. In bridging the divide between theory and practice, collaborative research highlights how theoretical and practical learnings may inform and enhance the other.

Collaborative learning emphasizes the importance of relationships and conversations. Sustaining the conversation between theory and practice-oriented

audiences emphasizes that engaged scholars need to develop and enact practical skills to preserve and invite meaningful difference in their relationships and conversations with non-academic practitioners. For example, researchers need to make choices on how to manage challenges in interaction, such as "ethically important moments" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Because interaction can protect or harm participants, engaged organizational research places responsibility on researchers to consider "real people with real consequences (Stohl, 2005, p. 206)" and to recognize that "it is therefore in these interactions that the integrity of the researcher is really on the line" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275).

Dempsey and Barge (2014) highlight three main tensions associated with conducting engaged scholarship regarding the challenges they encounter in relationships with participants or other non-academics. First, the representation-intervention tension refers to the extent to which engaged researchers view their role as describing or intervening in organizations or communities. For example, to what degree does the investigator's research design and analysis aim to describe a social conflict experienced within a community or facilitate an intervention aimed at managing this conflict? To illustrate this tension, a descriptive research project would pursue the more basic aims of representing how organizational members interact with one another in conflict situations whereas intervention research would take it a step further to incorporate this insight towards conflict management efforts aims at improving the conflict situation.

Second, the distance-empathy tension refers to the degree to which the research should support existing organizational and community practices or challenge them.

Returning to my previous example, this tension could materialize as a researcher balancing between directly challenging power disparities characterizing a community experiencing social conflict with crafting a critique of conflict practices that is empathetic to those whose privileged positions it questions, thus softening the critique. In the former, the distance between the researcher and the community may allow the researcher to retain their academic freedom and create a more direct critique while in the latter, being empathetic may lead to a softer critique of the community's practice, or no critique at all given organizational politics.

Third, the scholar-practitioner role tension refers to differences between academic and non-academics' view of the process and product of research. Simpson and Seibold (2008) argue that practical engagements between researchers and practitioners confront scholars with a variety of issues regarding how research problems are defined, the availability of resources for undertaking research efforts, what kind of research deliverables are considered valuable, and varying time commitments and desired project timelines. For example, to what degree does the research process timeline meet the needs of a scholar who is seeking tenure and promotion versus the needs of a practitioner whose need might be immediate application of the generated knowledge to the conflict? This tension highlights the challenge for engaged scholars to strike a balance in how their research connect their needs with those of practitioners.

Dempsey and Barge (2014) suggest these tensions may be managed through three general strategies or conversations: (1) co-design, (2) co-missioning, and (3) co-enactment. First, in co-designed research spaces, researchers and participants are free to

explore and revise their design ideas as projects unfold. Strategies associated with co-design are carried out in deliberate conversations among research collaborators. For example, researchers and participants typically stay in close contact so they can check in and make adjustments to research design as project needs emerge and change. They may also confer with each other to determine the extent to which researchers' interests in academic freedom are balanced with participants' needs to protect confidential organizational information. Such collaborative work requires that researchers are skilled at adapting to and improvising during evolving project designs.

Second, Dempsey and Barge (2014) offer co-missioning as a strategy for researchers and participants to negotiate the scope of the project. In co-missioning conversations, researchers and participants form pluralistic definitions of the problem being addressed and articulate and explore ways to leverage their different needs, interests, and expertise regarding the problem. This may entail engaging with those experiencing the problem being addressed through research and creating agreements on the level of critique the research may generate and the rights and responsibilities of organizational members involved in the co-production of knowledge.

Third, co-enactment is offered as a strategy for managing these tensions, in which researchers and participants share the task of deliberating, interpreting, and implementing project findings. Working together in analysis, researchers are able to "fact check" their findings with participants, who in turn are able to contribute to the final research products (Meares et al., 2004). Also, the parties may discuss the deliverables of projects such as publications in relevant outlets to their respective

audiences, in order to be useful to the needs of each party and to also generate future conversations on the implications and next steps for the work. Researchers and participants collaborate to develop organizational change efforts that could be implemented in light of the research findings (Simpson & Seibold, 2008). This involves jointly develop action steps to be taken in the organization to implement solutions identified through their research. These collaborators may also discuss the ways that debriefing techniques could be used to facilitate these conversations and generate learning (Lipshitz, Popper, & Friedman, 2002).

Sensitive Research Settings and Engaged Scholarship Practice

The challenges associated with conducting engaged scholarship and the need for researchers to be mindful of how they manage research conversations with nonacademic practitioners and organizations are particularly pronounced in sensitive research settings. Sensitive research refers to the topic studied, the surrounding situation, and consequences (Lee, 1993). Research is considered sensitive when it addresses issues that are private matters or socially deviant activities (Warr, 2004) as well as politically-sensitive issues that might generate social conflict (Lee, 1993; Lee & Renzetti, 1990). Sensitive research poses greater complexity than is commonly encountered in qualitative research (Alty & Rodham, 1998; Lee, 1993; McCosker, Barnard, & Gerber, 2001).

In the context of sensitive research, the research relationship between the researcher and participants may carry with it emotional and/or physical consequences (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009). Previous work in this area offers researchers' reflections on sensitive issues in healthcare and social work and has

documented the physical and emotional effects that researchers and participants may experience when conducting this work (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; McCosker et al., 2001; Warr, 2004). For example, McCosker et al. (2001) considered the personal safety issues created by undertaking sensitive research with abused women. An implication of their research is that developing safety plans when designing research projects for sensitive settings, are important for the personal well-being of researchers and participants involved.

Studying issues of a sensitive nature often leads to an expectation that there will be heightened scrutiny or concern with the process and product of research in which participants are engaged. Engaged sensitive research may pose particularly complex or layered challenges that need to be navigated in practice. How much scholars intervene in social issues becomes more critical in sensitive settings where the afterlife and the impact of those interventions are magnified. The interests of participants also may be foregrounded at the expense of academic interests in sensitive settings because of the relatively high stakes facing participants. What these challenges point to is that engaged research efforts focusing on sensitive issues may confront greater challenges in ensuring no harm to participants, a central ethical consideration of engaged scholarship (Cheney, 2008). Researchers also need to be protected in sensitive research, so ensuring that no harm comes to them as well (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

Engaged sensitive research poses particularly complex or layered challenges that need to be navigated in practice. Yet, relatively little guidance in the literature on engaged scholarship literature exists for how to navigate sensitive topics with most

advice centering on general recommendations for structuring the scholar-nonacademic practitioner relationship and conversation such as asking "big" questions and designing projects of a longer duration (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). The lack of empirical research into the way that academics actually manage difficult research conversations in practice is surprising because engaged scholars engage in research that likely pose navigational challenges, such as research requiring access to security sensitive organizations (Barbour & Gill, 2014) or research with ethical implications for life-and-death situations (Simpson & Seibold, 2008).

The purpose of this study is to examine the concrete challenges of engaged scholarship practice and articulate these challenges as they are encountered in sensitive research. The scholarly conversation on engaged scholarship is in need of a clearer understanding of what actually happens when scholars conduct engaged work, especially areas that pertain to sensitive research, what they do when they encounter challenges during the research process, and what they do to overcome those challenges while maintaining the integrity of the engaged research approach. As a result, I pose the following research question: "What are the situated challenges associated with engaged researcher-participant relationships and conversations and what strategies do researchers use to manage them?"

Methods

I used qualitative interviews, field journal entries, and my email correspondence with participants to explore the situated challenges that emerged within the conduct of engaged scholarship regarding sensitive issues. My participants currently occupied or

had previous occupied a role as a representative of their organization regarding Navy training activities and their impact on marine mammals. The analysis I undertook in this study reflects on my own research practices in managing difficult conversations with participants. My analysis focuses on research process challenges and management strategies I encountered while managing my relationship as an engaged scholar with participants.

The Navy-Marine Mammal Issue

The protection of marine mammals according to major environmental laws and its enforcement is a contentious and controversial issue (Zirbel, Balint, & Parsons, 2011). It is important for the Navy to conduct training activities such as sonar use and underwater detonations to maintain military preparedness, however these activities have been implicated in the death or significant trauma of marine mammals (Balcomb & Claridge, 2001; Evan & Englander, 2001). As a result, a number of studies have been conducted regarding the connection between Naval training activities and harm to marine mammals (DeReuiter et al., 2013; Evans & England, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2005; Jepson et al., 2003; Southall et al., 2009; Tyack et al., 2011).

The Navy-marine mammal issue has brought together representatives of organizations with diverse positions. At the federal level, the Navy is the action agency, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the regulatory agency, and the Marine Mammal Commission (The Commission) is an independent government agency that has been described as a watch dog agency for marine mammals. It should be noted that NMFS is distinct from its parent agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA), however the two are regarded as representing a united interest, among the key representatives in the Navy-marine mammal issue. For the purposes of this study I will refer to all NOAA and NMFS representatives with a NOAA/NMFS affiliation. Additional key organizations involved in the issue include various environmental non-government organizations (NGOs), the California Coastal Commission (the Coastal Commission) as the state oversight of federal agency actions in state waters, and the scientist community.

The surrounding political and legal climate of this multi-stakeholder environmental conflict makes it a high-stakes issue for the stakeholders and a sensitive research topic. The public appeal of marine mammals is high and the Navy-marine mammal issue has received a good deal of public and media attention. The various stakeholders have tended to interpret differently the scientific basis of the issue and need for training regulation or marine mammal protection. These differences have escalated into legal conflict since 1997, when a NGO headed to court seeking, unsuccessfully, to block Navy training activities off the coast of Hawaii (Zirbel et al., 2011). A U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2008 found in favor of the Navy because "any such [irreparable injury to marine mammals] is outweighed by the public interest and the Navy's interest in effective, realistic training of its sailors" (Winter v. NRDC 2008, 3). Lawsuits continue as part of this ongoing controversy.

My decision to pursue this topic for my dissertation stemmed from the social relevance of this issue, its high intractability, and its usefulness as a case study of inter-organizational conversations. In a previous study, Navy and NGO participants, the two

main organizations involved in lawsuits, indicated interest in more cooperative relationships and more open lines of communication (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010). As an opportunity to generate useful knowledge for the individuals involved in the issue and further theory on inter-organizational dialogue facilitation, this sensitive issue appeared well suited to be addressed through engaged scholarship.

Researcher Positionality

This study is one of three studies comprising my dissertation that collectively address the challenges associated with managing difficult conversations regarding socially relevant issues. In the first two studies within my dissertation, I collected qualitative interview data from key organizational representatives involved in the Navy-marine mammal issue to investigate the logics and emotionality associated with participants' experiences in difficult conversations. The third study in my dissertation was originally conceived of as a quantitative survey to test empirically propositions emerging from the interview data. The decision to conduct the present study instead came about when I realized I was both investigating difficult conversations as a theoretical construct (the focus of the first two studies) as well as having difficult conversations with participants during the research process. The latter suggested that a potential research focus regarding the ways researchers manage difficult conversations regarding sensitive issues.

Soon after I began recruiting participants for interviews, I felt I needed to write about the challenging experiences I was encountering in my role as researcher. I began a journal where I documented not only details of my experience as a researcher and how I

communicated with participants in my role, but also feedback I was picking up from participants regarding my research. The journal started out serving an administrative function; I needed to keep track of what changes I was making to my project, and a host of other challenges that I was coming up against, some I had anticipated and others that I was totally unprepared for. In my journal, I made notes of my email correspondence with participants, memorable moments from the interviews, and changes I was making or deliberating.

One month into the four-month data collection period, on July 29, 2015, I made a journal entry where for the first time I described explicitly the process I was taking to respond to participants during the research process. Up until that time, my entries included copious amounts of details on what I was encountering, details regarding what I did and why I did it. But in the July 29, 2015 entry, I for the first time began to journal about my evolving approach to the relationship with participants. I began paying attention to how my experiences working with participants were unfolding and how my attunement to our relationship was informing my decisions. I started to journal questions like "How am I going to handle this?" and statements to the tune of "Man, having these conversations are hard!" My approach here in reflecting on my own research practice draws inspiration from autoethnographic research, such as Miller's (2002) reflection on professing during a crisis event, where the emphasis is on understanding how oneself experiences an unfolding event, situation or circumstance. In this case, I was examining how I had experienced my conversations with participants and how my experiences served as a useful lens for examining engaged scholar-participant relationships.

I should note that the July 29th entry only stuck out to me in hindsight. Rather remarkably, my gaze turned inward without me consciously making that decision. I started to associate the term "difficult conversations" with my data collection process, but at the time, I didn't have enough perspective to make sense of why. After my interviews were conducted, I began to analyze my interview data for the first two studies and piece together memorable moments from the interviews, email correspondence with participants, and my field notes and journal entries. I noticed a process of continuous adaptation and metamorphosis that I engaged in to address some key challenges I encountered. My sensitivity to the language I used with participants, my monitoring of conversations to stay attuned of the unfolding external and internal factors that may impact my relationships with participants; these and other practices constituted the reflexive practice, my "engaged reflexivity" (Stohl, 2005), which informed my decisions for managing a variety of challenges that emerged throughout the research process.

Data and Participants

Semi-structured interviews (Tracy, 2013), field notes/journals and email correspondence formed the data set used in this study. This included twenty-two typed single-spaced pages of field notes, research journal entries, and email correspondence with participants during the data collection phase. Interviews were chosen because they offered me the ability to examine the challenges associated with the conduct of the interview process. Field notes and journal entries made during the data collection process provided further insight into the process generally and interview context more specifically.

In an attempt to capture the full network of representatives working on this issue, I first identified potential participants through purposeful sampling. My initial sample included existing contacts stemming from previous research efforts (for example, Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010) as well as individuals listed in a variety of publically available documents pertaining to the issue: attendance lists for dialogue and science workshops, War of the Whales (Horwitz, 2014), press releases and news articles, and legal documents from past and/or current litigation. I then broadened the list of those solicited using snowball sampling; recruiting suggested contacts collected from those in the initial sample. To ensure I was soliciting all relevant representatives, I announced my study in two popular listservs relevant to marine mammal and acoustic issues.

All participants were emailed an introduction to the study. In this email was attached an information sheet indicating an assurance of confidentiality. In all, eighty-three representatives were recruited across six organizations identified in the sampling process as key organizations in the Navy-marine mammal issue. Two recruited representatives from the Department of Justice did not respond so that organization was not represented in the study. Table 5 reports the organizational demographics for the final sample consisting of 29 representatives, who: (a) were affiliated with a key organization involved in the issue, and (a) had prior/current experience interacting with representatives of other key organizations involved in the issue. The study's 35% response rate reflects: (1) my efforts to solicit from anyone who potentially met the participation criteria, and (2) a high number of currently active representatives who declined participation due to legal concerns.

Table 5. *Demographic Summary for Study 3 Sample*

Organization	Recruited	Participated[a]	Response Rate[b]
Navy	22	7	30%
NGO community	24	11	48%
NOAA/NMFS	16	5	31%
Science community	10	3	30%
The Commission	7	3	43%
Coastal Commission	2	1	50%

a – Number of participants totals 30 in table because one representative was interviewed under their previous and current organizational affiliations
b – response rates rounded to nearest whole number

Interviews running 45-90 minutes in length were conducted June to October 2015 either in person or over the phone. Interviews were semi-structured with the use of an interview guide. The guide included questions regarding: (1) representatives' experiences in conversations with other representatives on the Navy-marine mammal issue, (2) their descriptions of challenging and relatively easier moments in these conversations, and (3) descriptions of their feelings during these moments and reflections on their struggle or success with managing their feelings. I requested follow up interviews with any participant with whom I ran out of time. Interviews totaled about 36 hours and 1000 transcribed pages.

Analysis

The field note and interview data were analyzed by looking to identify challenges associated with my relationship with participants while undertaking the dissertation research project. In order to make sense of the data, a two-stage analysis process was used. In the first stage, thematic analysis of the field notes and interview transcripts was conducted. The thematic analysis followed a version of Tracy's (2013) iterative analysis.

First I read through the data multiple times for the purpose of gaining a sense of possible interpretations. I focused on gaining a sense of the tone of interaction, difference in perspective between my participants and me, marking any challenges that stuck out immediately. Then, I conducted primary-cycle coding where I coded for the purpose of capturing the essence of my or participants' actions and words. The focus here was to be specifically looking for challenges in the research process associated with the researcher-participant relationship. For example, if a participant said, "I'm not going to give names because I don't want it to get out that I told you this," this statement was coded as suggesting their concern for confidentiality. If I journaled, "Today I noticed some participants are asking for the interview guide in advance so they can get permission to participate," this statement was coded as suggesting my challenge to gain organizational access.

During the coding process, a constant comparative method was used to ensure I defined codes consistently (Charmaz, 2014). Each primary code referred to a specific challenge I encountered. For each challenge, I also identified my strategy for addressing it during the research. To facilitate this process, a codebook listing codes, their definitions, and representative quotes was created. During secondary-cycle coding, the identified challenges were grouped into broader emergent themes (Tracy, 2013). Owen's (1984) criteria of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness were used to substantiate a theme. In this study, forcefulness was interpreted as the strength of mine or my participants' opinions on a particular matter. For example, this was the case when a

theme emerged from only a few entries in my field notes and I included it because my opinions on the matter were so strong.

Each theme represented a main challenge I encountered in my conversations with representatives. The data was grouped by identified challenges only, not management strategies, to preserve multiple strategies in the data for a given theme. Data from email correspondence with participants were used to support the main challenges identified. Because these emails were not being used as primary sources of data, they were not coded. Negative case analysis was used in order to check interpretations of themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

Results

The emergent themes represent the main challenges I faced when managing my relationships and conversations with representatives as I attempted to develop collaborative participant relationships regarding the sensitive Navy-marine mammal issue. The themes that were identified represent challenges to the collection of data, the analysis of the data, and the write-up of the data. The majority of themes highlighted the challenges of structuring and conducting an evolving data collection process (Organizational Access, Interview Confidentiality-Disclosure, Maintaining Neutrality, Facilitating Disclosure, and Construct Resonance). An additional challenge was associated with analyzing and writing up my dissertation studies, including the present study (Analysis Confidentiality-Disclosure).

Organizational Access

It is often said gaining access for research is one of the most difficult challenges facing researchers and that was certainly true for me in conducting this sensitive research. Having pre-existing contact with some of the representatives working on the issue was helpful for accessing the various organizations. Getting access to additional potential participants was more difficult. If I wanted access to the federal agencies involved in issue, I found myself confronting legal barriers. Some representatives indicated they needed approval from their organization's legal counsel before being interviewed. They requested my interview guide in advance so their organization's lawyers could review it. Many representatives cited a lack of legal approval as the reason for declining to participate in my research. These declined invitations left me wondering if it would be possible to modify my approach in a way that still met my needs but would gain approval from legal counsel. My strategy in confronting this challenge was to rethink the image my research materials were promoting. I began to pay closer attention to *self-marketing* (Warzel, 2011).

My invitations to potential participants spanned across all levels of the organizations involved in the issue, from staff to senior leadership. This combined with the fact that my research was being submitted to legal teams for approval, meant that my research project and myself as a researcher got exposure at top levels of the organizations. I began to consider what image my research materials promoted. Although I was already confident they were well written and approved by my institutional review board, confronting the challenge of gaining legal approval in

exchange for organizational access, made me consider these materials in a new light. Did my materials raise legal concerns unintentionally? Further enlightening still were the numerous recruitment emails that went unanswered. Had the legal barrier not been posed in this research, I would have interpreted this as a normal occurrence in research. However, encountering the legal barrier had forced me to reconsider my materials and now I wondered how my emails came across to a busy professional. Did my materials convey the usefulness of my study to representatives? Given that these are especially busy people given the high profile nature of their jobs, it would be important that they saw value and utility in my study.

Furthermore, I needed to consider how my materials emphasized my neutrality on the highly controversial and sensitive Navy-marine mammal issue. I became alerted to this important consideration when an NGO participant asked, "How do you get across to people that you can be trusted?" Another NGO participant asked if I received Navy funding to conduct my dissertation, to which I explained that all my funding stemmed from affiliation with Texas A&M as a doctoral student. After fielding these questions, I felt further convinced that I needed to consider more closely how I was presenting my neutrality.

As I began to read self-marketing and networking websites as well as tips on email business etiquette (Blanda, n. d., Suster, 2013; Warzel, 2011), I generated a new perspective on my research "brand" as I came to see it. I came to view my research as something I was trying to connect with my potential participants to encourage their participation, much in the way that marketers try to connect with consumers so they can

sell them something. Rather than seeing myself as selling my research to organizations, I saw myself connecting with them in ways that engaged their needs. A journal entry of mine captures this shift in perspective nicely: "Normally when you set a coffee meeting you would hope for 30 minutes. To be asking 60 minutes is a lot from professionals. So I REALLY have to make it worth their while, and that 'contributing to our understanding' bullshit…is not valuable to them." In this way, I saw a clear connection between the recruitment process and self-marketing; self-marketing became my strategy for pursing organizational access. Recruitment materials should meet both review board requirements and the professional norms of their audience.

Once I looked at my email as being addressed and sent to a busy professional, I found a needed to edit my materials. My original email stated the reason for my research upfront without suggesting what I offered in return. From a networking perspective, that is not an effective way to grab the attention of someone and neglects the collaborative emphasis of engaged researcher-participant relationships move us to balance out the benefits to both. The email also did not give the reader a clear sense of my interest in studying the Navy-marine mammal or my qualifications. With approval from my review board analyst, I rewrote the email to state this pertinent information in the very beginning. The resulting re-written introduction to my recruitment email read like this:

> My name is Eleni and I am a PhD Candidate in Communication at Texas A&M University. I am emailing you to request your participation in my dissertation research project. My dissertation research is focusing on the way conversational

dynamics are managed by representatives involved in complex environmental issues and I'm using the Navy-marine mammal issue as a case study. The goal of my project is to provide a useful analysis for representatives as they move forward on this issue, so I'm happy to share the results of my dissertation with participants. My research expertise is in dialogue facilitation within problem-solving processes and I'm looking to generate new insight in this area of research through my dissertation. My qualifications include training in mediation by the State of Texas and advanced training in interview techniques. You can learn more about my research and background by visiting my LinkedIn profile at https://www.linkedin.com/in/geschwho.

Although I have no quantifiable evidence that my self-marketing strategy increased my access into organizations, adopting a self-marketing strategy did enable me to promote a more clear and concise introduction to my project and highlighted the benefit of people's participation. This mindset led me down a new path of considering more seriously what I offered to participants, and how I connected to them during the recruitment process.

Interview Confidentiality-Disclosure

During the data collection process, I found it challenging when faced with requests for confidential information from participants. While I made it clear to my participants that their participation in my research was completely confidential, they still expressed concern for confidentiality. They expressed concern their names would be

connected to their comments. They sought assurance from me before the official interview began that their comments would remain protected. One participant laughed off the assurance I gave, saying he would just deny everything anyways. Sometimes their concerns were aired unsolicited by me while other times they would raise their concern when I requested permission to record. Unsolicited comments tended to be associated with my request to record interviews as one participant explicitly commented that he would be more cautious in his words if I was going to record.

I also needed to manage instances where participants asked me for information that would violate my confidentiality agreement. For example, some participants wanted to know who else I'd talked to, or in some cases had been told by their colleagues of participating and ask me about that person's participation. I felt challenged because I wanted to engage with them in a way that invited dialogue and exhibited reciprocity but also knew that I couldn't provide them the information they sought. Engaging participants as co-researchers meant demonstrating the same spirit of openness that I hoped to encourage in participants.

Participants' concerns for confidentiality and the participation of others made sense given the sensitive nature of the Navy-marine mammal issue. During the time I was collecting a data, a landmark settlement among the Navy, NMFS and several NGOs was being finalized and participants expressed concern with their participation in my research having any influence on those negotiations. Maintaining openness while protecting confidentiality meant meeting my needs of conducting an ethical process, while also engaging with participants in meaningful conversations that would satisfy

their needs. The decision to disclose or not, was one that I often made in the moment, which made it particularly stressful for me.

I managed this challenge with two strategies, which I refer to as: (1) polite deflection, and (2) political astuteness. *Polite deflection* is a strategy in which I would courteously redirect requests that breached participant confidentiality. When requests were phrased rhetorically and couched within other comments, it was possible to not directly address them. When I was asked directly, I would explain the confidentiality agreement to the participant and connect my inability to disclosure the requested information back to their participation as well. I kept my tone casual and light so it wouldn't come across as me shutting down their question. The following excerpt is an example of me employing the polite deflection strategy:

> Interviewee: Well he is sure, I understand you've already talked to him.
>
> Eleni: Well so actually because I guarantee confidentiality…
>
> Interviewee: [He] told me that you talked to him.
>
> Eleni: Yes okay that's fine.
>
> Interviewee: You can neither confirm nor deny.
>
> Eleni: There you go.

Political astuteness is defined as one's skill with gauging one's context, reading other's behaviors, and being able to consider political factors in decisions (Hartley, Alford, Hughes, & Yates, 2013). Exercising these political skills helped me navigate an

unforeseen challenge: facing requests for organizational participation. I hadn't considered beforehand whether identifying groups of participants, rather than the individuals, was a violation of confidentiality. It didn't appear an outright breach of confidentiality because they were not asking about individual participation. However, in gauging the surrounding legal conflict that had positioned particular organizations as opponents, I felt there could be an afterlife to a decision to speak explicitly about the organizations I was sampling. My hesitation to disclose stemmed from knowing the sensitivity of this issue coupled with the small network of professionals involved, I thought perhaps naming specific organizations might make individual participation obvious to others in the network. I also knew there could be questions to my research's credibility if people did not know certain players were involved. A previous study (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2010) had suggested there were strong feelings associated with which groups were invited to participate in conversations on this issue so I needed to assure participants that all key groups were invited to be a part of my study.

My strategy to manage this challenge was to respond that while I could not reveal individual participation, I could confirm the categories of organizations involved. When pressed to reveal specific organizations, I did so only if they alone constituted a separate perspective on the issue, like the Navy. When a group of organizations constituted a separate perspective, like the NGO community, I did not disclose the specific organizations that had participated.

Maintaining Neutrality

I faced another challenge in conveying a position of neutrality in my role as researcher. My interest in the issue lay in exploring the communication process of representatives with one another as they discussed and deliberated on the issue as opposed to the specific outcomes of their conversations. My perspective on the issue was not appropriate here, so I needed to be considerate in responses when participants would tell me things about others. Comments referring to who else I might talk to and what they might tell me suggested participants' interest in what I would learn from others, a curiosity of the other perspectives I was hearing. Though I perceived comments such as "You could tell I'm fascinated by the interaction myself so I'd be very curious to see what everybody tells you not just [my organization] [laughter]" and "Essentially we're in the middle, I'm sure you can see that," as benign, they were constant reminders that I was the neutral in this, the middle man among parties who were talking about each other.

I needed to respond to them in meaningful ways that kept the openness alive without compromising my neutral stance. When faced with comments or questions that referred to my positions on the issue, I employed several strategies: (1) neutral validation, (2) process emphasis, and (3) cocktail party framing. *Neutral validation* involved validating the question I was asked and providing a response that allowed me to remain disengaged from any process where I would assign value, or bias. On numerous occasions, participants had trouble recalling names during interviews and would know enough of the name that I had a pretty good idea of who they were talking

to. Again, the network of professionals working on this issue is relatively small and my position as researcher in a previous study and this one had given me familiarity with many names. As often occurs in natural conversations, when participants had trouble recalling, they would ask me for help remembering or confirming their recollection and in the beginning if I knew who they were describing it was my natural inclination of being polite to offer the name they likely sought. That put me in a position for them to ask me if I knew those people, which I did not. The following is one such challenging instance:

> Interviewee: And I did a major report that was filed to the [Organization] through, what is his name, he was a, starts with a D, do you remember him? [She] reported to him, it's a shame I don't remember names
>
> Eleni: No that's fun, alright so then what we have is this map.
>
> Interviewee: [Him].
>
> Eleni: Oh [Him], okay.
>
> Interviewee: And you know him.
>
> Eleni: Well I know the name.
>
> Interviewee: Yeah okay.

As in the above example, my strategy was to provide neutral validation. By saying I knew of the name, my response was neutral while validating participants' attempts to engage me. Reflecting on this particular scenario helped me realize the tough

position I was putting myself in by taking this active role in participants' stories. I learned to let people fumble and recall what they would, thus reducing the occurrence of challenges to my neutrality.

Participants wanted to know my motivation behind studying this particular issue. Their comments suggested that suspicion among the organizations on this issue was high and that information sharing was a guarded practice. As an outsider, I was unknown to most of the people I interviewed and without an affiliation to any of the key organizations involved, it might have been unclear where my interest in the issue lay. The *process emphasis* strategy referred to my attempt to show that I did not have an interest in any particular outcome, that I was neutral on the issue, and interested in the process of communication among representatives. Prior to the data collection period, I had crafted a recruitment email script and information sheet to position myself as a neutral researcher. Despite having these materials, participants still wanted to know more from me. Using the process emphasis strategy, I walked participants through my selection of the Navy-marine mammal issue as a case study, given its exemplar as a site for the inter-organizational professional conversations I wanted to study.

> Interviewee: Could you give a little bit more background on why you're doing this, the motivation for it?
>
> Eleni: Sure! Yes. So, I'm a PhD candidate at A&M in the communication department, and I am developing my expertise in dialogue facilitation. For this project, what I am looking at is how representatives, you know, from different

> organizations, when they come together on complex issues, whether that's a policy issue or an issue affecting an organization; how they communicate with each other and the conversational dynamics involved there. And so, what I've done is, I've decided to focus on a policy level issue in the environmental arena. And I've chosen the Navy activities – Marine Mammal Issue as a case study. And so, what I am looking to do here, is interview people – representatives from different organizations involved on this issue and ask them about their experiences, having conversations. So, I'm looking to find out, where or who you're having conversations with; like what kind of conversations are you involved with, on a professional – in a professional capacity. And then also, learning about your experiences in those conversations. So that's kind of the motivation and the interest behind me asking you for an interview.

Additional questions answered with the process emphasis strategy included those referring to the sources of my funding, my connections to any of the key organizations, and what I planned to do with the results. Implicit and explicitly, participants connected their questions to trust. Their questions indicated an interest in ascertaining where I stood and perhaps this was a way of confirming that my position as a researcher on the issue was in fact neutral. In all of these cases, I connected in my responses back to my interest in the process of communication. My descriptions of my role as a researcher, my institutional affiliation, and where this research fit into my overall professional goals reiterated a stake in social issue communication processes rather than outcomes.

In responding to these questions, I found that I realized weaknesses in my assertion of credibility. For example, after one participant engaged me in a conversation about what I was doing to assure participants I could be trusted not to sell the results of my study to any particular organization, I found myself re-examining my recruitment email. He raised questions regarding my research method training qualifications, and my manner of framing my interest in the Navy-marine mammal issue. When I re-examined my email script after our conversation, I noticed that it focused more on what I was trying to accomplish and less on who I was. Comments such as his suggested I needed to present my position of neutrality and sources of credibility first. Under the approval of my review board, I was able to continue data collection with a script that framed my request for interviews with my training as a State of Texas mediator and in research methods, as well as my interest in the communication dimension of the issue specifically.

In all of my explaining my motivation for the study or providing other requested information on my interest in the Navy-marine mammal issue, I employed what I refer to as *cocktail party framing*. This strategy involved a shift in the language I used to talk about my research interests. Borrowing from the idea that at cocktail parties or other social gatherings when one is not surrounded by colleagues familiar with technical jargon, I made a shift to general language so I could connect with non-communication scholars. This connection was especially important when responding to participants' needs for clarification on my interest in the issue. Like many other scholars, nothing in graduate school prepared me to speak about my research in a non-technical way. I drew

upon my experience telling friends and family what it is that I study, in order to strip away technical and academic jargon.

Cocktail party framing meant, for example, that I did not refer to the root of my study as inter-organizational communication although communication scholars would certainly understand it as such. I simply said I was interested in understanding the conversations that take place among representatives of different organizations. In another example, cocktail party framing meant explaining my sampling strategy to a participant. They wanted to know if I was sampling from the organizations equally and I explained that I was first reaching out to those I was aware of working on the issue, and then using participant suggestions to find additional relevant representatives, rather than using the technical shorthand of calling it snowball sampling.

Facilitating Disclosure

Promoting participant disclosure during the interview regarding their experiences working on the Navy-marine mammal issue was difficult at times given my research focus regarding emotion and sensitive information. First, part of the interview guide was devoted to exploring participants' insight into the role that emotion played in their professional conversations on the issue. I felt a bit apprehensive asking participants to talk about emotion when it became clear after the first couple of interviews I conducted that speaking about their personal experiences in a professional setting took some participants out of their comfort zone. Some participants paused when asked, "What influences the way you engaged in that conversation?" When I asked, "How did you feel in that conversation?" participants often paused, laughed, or denied they had had any

feelings at all. While I knew that talking about emotion likely wouldn't be easy for anyone to talk about, especially with a researcher they had just met, I was not prepared for the way in which it seemed to unsettle participants. I felt challenged in that I needed to stay attuned to signs of distress or discomfort while talking about things of a personal or emotional nature that could potentially overstep participants' personal boundaries and make them feel I was intruding.

On the other hand, it was expected that these kinds of interview questions could be more difficult to answer and that participants would vary in their ability to share this kind of information with me. In this sense, the challenge to facilitate participant disclosure referred to my need to pick up on receptive cues from participants, adjusting or responding my approach as the interview unfolded. I refer to my strategy for managing this challenge during "emotion questions" as "*clarifying the ask*" which helped balance the tension between being sensitive and being assertive. When participants pushed back or closed up upon me when asking them about emotion, I would explain why I was asking them for this information to show that these questions were relevant to my research and that I cared about their perspectives as individuals and professionals. For example, in the following example I was sensitive to the fact I may have intruded on the participants' personal space, and used the "clarifying the ask" strategy to cautiously try again:

> Eleni: How do you manage to be patient when you're feeling frustrated? How do you go about doing that?

Interviewee: It's just like a psychological evaluation.

Eleni: No, I'm sorry, I don't mean it to be. But I'm really interested in understanding when you're feeling that way in these types of professional conversations, how do you do it? How do you go about trying to keep your eye on the prize, or being patient? I'm just really curious how you go about managing those feelings.

Interviewee: Well the first thing I suppose that pops into my mind is because I'm a parent…

I perceived this strategy to work here because I picked up on a more relaxed tone in the interviewee's voice once I clarified why I was asking the particular question. Although I perceived an awkward moment at first, it did not close off the conversation, which I perceived as indication that the participant was still open to engaging in the subject with me. What seemed to allow this strategy to work in this awkward moment was that by explaining the motivations behind my questions, I demonstrated transparency which allowed the interview to see that I did not have an intention to make him uncomfortable or put him in a compromising position but rather my intention was to learn about his perspective.

Second, another challenge to facilitate disclosure was because the direction of my conversations with participants during interviews covering sensitive territory that they at times struggled to detail. When asking participants to describe conversations they perceived as difficult, some indicated hesitation or concern with providing details of

these conversations. These reasons emanated from the legal structures in which these conversations took place. For example, some conversations they referred to had taken place in confidential settlement agreements. Others included classified information. Their statements suggested concern with the potential consequences of their disclosure. In this way, my assurance of confidentiality ceased to matter because participants did not see disclosure of sensitive information their choice to make. Their concern came was expressed as a desire to protect self as well as a landmark pending settlement, which could be impacted by even unattributed details made public. The stakes were clearly high when talking about participants' difficult conversations.

During conversations that treaded in sensitive territory, some participants would frame their comments as matters of public record. This appeared to be for their benefit rather than mine but it also clued me into potential discomfort my participants felt in deciding what to disclose to me or not. I faced a challenge in how to facilitate participant disclosure of communicative experiences while also ensuring my questions did not ask participants to disclose information that threatened them professionally and potentially legally. My strategy here was to use *hypothetical questioning*. If they told me they could not to describe a conversation in detail, I would rephrase the question and ask them to describe the conversation in hypothetical terms. Hypothetical questions emphasized the communication practice, process, style, and role that I wished to study, while removing the names and specifics that posed harm to participants. The following excerpt exhibits my use of the hypothetical questioning strategy:

Interviewee: They know what they're doing is wrong and they do it anyway, because they don't want to stand up to the Navy.

Eleni: Is there a recent conversation you had that…

Interviewee: Oh, it happens all the time. Just, there's various examples of why it happens and how it happens. I don't really want to get into all the details about it.

Eleni: OK. Well, without us getting too much in the details, let me ask you this. In that type of scenario where you're saying they know but they're still letting certain things happen, what might you say to them? You don't have to tell me what you've actually, what's actually happened. Give me a hypothetical of a scenario, of what you might say to them or what they might say to you, describe that back and forth.

Construct Resonance

I found it challenging at times to connect with participants because some of the terms I used did not resonate with them. Although I tried to avoid using technical jargon, I did bring into the interviews some terms I felt would be commonly understood only to discover in my conversations with participants that they were ambiguous or loaded. Construct resonance was challenging in a number of ways and as co-researchers, participants influenced how I adapted my use of key concepts in order to better connect with them. My strategy for adapting constructs so they resonated with participants was to employ *resonance checks*. Resonance checks involved turning to participants for their expertise on the issue and commonly used terms understood in their organization; as

insiders they were in a better position than me to know how representatives referred to the concepts I was studying. Turning to participant expertise involved responding to cues during the interview that a term might be causing confusion and following participants' lead to re-define my understanding of a term as it resonated with their experiences or expertise.

First, resonance checks with participants helped me overcome a challenge in construct resonance regarding the label I used to refer to what I now call the Navy-marine mammal issue. At the beginning of the research project, I referred to "the sonar issue" in all study materials and during the interview however I noticed some confusion once I began interviews. Some participants voiced confusion over what exactly I considered "the sonar issue." My intent was to define the issue as concerns for marine mammals as a result of Navy training activities, of which sonar use was one element. Historically it had been the most controversial and visible so I had thought it made sense to use the shorthand I often saw used in the media. Because of their confusion, participants alerted me that this label might not be a neutral term and might be conveying more meaning to participants than I had previously understood. As one participant explained, for most of the representatives working on the issue, labeling it as "the sonar issue" conjured negative connotation surrounding several key events where Navy sonar exercises were blamed for highly publicized whale deaths. Using this loaded label to not only introduce my research to potential participants but also guide my interview conversations was not something I felt comfortable proceeding with. I asked some participants how I might better label the issue I was interested in studying and their

brainstorming help during interviews led me to adopt a neutral label as "the navy-marine mammal issue" in all future research materials.

Second, I faced a challenge in how to move forward in interviews where participants appeared hesitant or concerned with questions regarding their experiences in "difficult" conversations. "Difficult conversations" is one of the key terms of my dissertation, and yet the word difficult did not resonate well across participants. For example:

> Eleni: Let me ask you this, on this list who would you point out as a difficult conversation?
>
> [Pause]
>
> Interviewee: Difficult is a tough word…I think that the hard ones for me are the folks that just say, "Don't let them do anything," and "You have just to say no to them." That's not realistic. I think they're all good…I don't really consider any…It's here's our position, there's their position, and we are going to try to come to as much of an agreement as we can. There's personal respect on both ends and as long as people are respecting each other, I don't consider it difficult.

"Difficult" did not resonate well, and this may be because there was a negative connotation associated for some participants. In my effort to avoid the use of loaded language, I employed resonance checks to find an alternate way forward. I picked up on their cues that the term difficult made them hesitate or perhaps uncomfortable and in the

moment, tried to recall other similar terms they had themselves already used during the interview. For example, the term "challenging" was often used by participants leading me to believe that this term might resonate with their experiences. When "difficult" did not resonate, I reposed my question using the term "challenging" instead to work participants through these experiences. "Challenging" was better received suggesting it as a more neutral or familiar way of perceiving experiences in these conversations.

Finally, I found that some participants did not connect with my use of organizational affiliation in questions as a means to distinguish difficult conversations. Part of my strategy of resonance checks was that I picked up on affiliation not resonating to them as a way to distinguish their easier from more difficult experiences in conversations. Staying open to how these experiences might better be distinguished, I turned to them for help in understanding what resonated better, such as in the following excerpt:

> Eleni: Which of those conversations that you're having are relatively easy?
>
> Interviewee: Yeah, I guess I'm having a hard time because it sounds like you want a distinction between the different groups whether these groups are hard versus easy and so on and I don't think it's that way. I mean, I wouldn't put one of these categories of stakeholders into a difficult or easy category. I think it's more depending on the nature of conversations.
>
> Eleni: Okay, that's helpful. Yes, and I was thinking, okay, we just talked about all the different groups maybe that is one way of looking at the spectrum, but

you're saying that, "No, that's not resonating with your experience." With your experience it's more on what the conversation is about that determines whether it's more challenging or less challenging.

Interviewee: Absolutely, because again, I do think that everyone is reasonably well intentioned and they have their own reasons in their positions.

Eleni: Let me ask you this. Okay, the affiliation makes no sense and I really appreciate you sharing that with me, that's very helpful. If the affiliation makes no sense to understand what's challenging and not challenging in having these conversations, are there certain types of topics, maybe, that you guys are discussing that present more of a challenge?

Interviewee: Well, I mean I think one instance of that would be in a situation where…

My strategy of resonance checks not only helped to maintain the good rapport between the participant and I, it also enabled both of us to meet our needs: I was able to move forward with questions that were relevant to my research and he was able to talk about his experiences in a way that was comfortable and resonated with him.

Analysis Confidentiality-Disclosure

While analyzing and writing up my data, I felt challenged on to what extent to disclose the participant's organizational affiliation in my analyses. As an organizational communication scholar, I was alert to the influence of representative's organizations in constraining or enabling the way they communicated with outside representatives.

However, I also perceived from participants' use of terms such as "parties," "win," and "got a good deal," that the Navy-marine mammal issue was framed as a negotiation that pitted the various organizations as competitors. Faced with this challenge of disclosure, I was concerned that characterizing the data through heavy emphasis on affiliation might further emphasize the organizational boundaries that separated representatives and disguise opportunities to interpret the data in innovative ways. This concern was especially salient given that there was a small network of professionals working on the issue. My concern was that there could be political consequences to individuals and organizations if comments could be connected to either and that disclosing organizational affiliation might make it more difficult to protect participant confidentiality.

I managed this challenge by employing a strategy I call *capturing the essence* where I focused on relaying the meaning of ideas shared with me in interviews and on the communication processes at play rather than with whom exactly they occurred. This helped me focus on communication concepts guide my analysis, while preserving my ability to disclose affiliation when relevant to these concepts. An example of this was when deciding how to share quotes from the interviews that referenced particular individuals or organizations, I was challenged to find a way to "clean up" the data without washing away its meaning. Rather than cite a specific organization that had brought suit on the Navy-marine mammal issue, I preserved the meaning in the data by referring to them as a litigant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify concrete challenges encountered by engaged organizational communication researchers as they manage their relationships and conversations with nonacademic practitioners in sensitive research settings. In focusing on these concrete challenges, I call attention to the means or practices by which research is conducted, rather than its ends or outcomes (Tracy, 2010). This work builds off of Dempsey and Barge's (2014) initial attempt to outline the challenges associated with a process-based vision of engaged scholarship. Table 6 summarizes the key challenges generated by the study and the strategies that may help manage them. I identified a number of practices including: (1) self-marketing, (2) polite deflection, (3) political astuteness, (4) neutral validation, (5) process emphasis, (6) cocktail party framing, (7) clarifying the ask, (8) hypothetical questioning, (9) resonance checks, and (10) capturing the essence. Three major implications emerge from this analysis regarding the emergent challenges associated with systemic relational connection and research access in sensitive organizational settings, the importance of surrounding legal and political

Table 6. *Ten Management Strategies for Situated Engaged Research Challenges*

Challenge		Strategies	
Organizational access	Balancing research needs with gaining organizations' legal approval for access to organizational representatives	(1) Self-marketing	Promoting research value and utility as well as researcher neutrality, through research materials

Table 6. Continued

Challenge		Strategies	
Interview confidentiality-disclosure	Maintaining openness with participants while protecting participation confidentiality	(2) Polite deflection	Courteously and casually redirecting requests that breach participant confidentiality to reminders of confidentiality agreement
		(3) Political astuteness	Gauging the research context, reading other's behaviors, and being able to consider political factors when making decisions
Maintaining neutrality	Maintaining openness with participants while protecting one's neutral stance	(4) Neutral validation	Providing responses that validate questions asked and remain disengaged from assignment of value or bias.
		(5) Process emphasis	Explaining motivation behind study as focused on interest in the process, rather than outcome, of communication among participants
		(6) Cocktail party framing	Talking about research in general terms, rather than technical and academic jargon
Facilitating disclosure	Balancing sensitivity and assertiveness when asking challenging questions that may make participants uncomfortable	(7) Clarifying the ask	Explaining the relevancy of challenging questions to research and expressing interest in participants' perspectives
		(8) Hypothetical questioning	Asking questions that emphasize the studied phenomena, while removing personally identifying information that may harm participants

Table 6. Continued

Challenge		Strategies	
Construct resonance	Using terminology that participants do not find ambiguous or loaded	(9) Resonance checks	Following participants' lead to re-define one's understanding of terms based on their experiences or expertise
Confidentiality-disclosure	Determining the extent of disclosure of participants' organizational affiliation in research analysis and write-up	(10) Capturing the essence	Identifying individuals and organizations with descriptors that capture the essence of their role in the communicative practice

contexts, and the need for engaged scholars to exercise situated judgment to manage emergent issues.

First, the analysis suggests that core challenges to scholar-practitioner conversations revolve around issues of relational connection and research access. The relational connection theme refers to developing and maintaining connections with participants through interpersonal relationships. The challenges associated with this theme include maintaining neutrality, facilitating disclosure, and construct resonance. Previous work describing the method of qualitative research suggests that an essential undertaking to this type of approach is drawing out the stories and subjective experiences of participants in order to understand social phenomena (Tracy, 2013). As a result, creating a common language is important so that participants can share relevant insights with researchers regarding these phenomena and avoid misunderstandings with them (Alty & Rodham, 1998). Previously identified relational issues include developing

trust and rapport demonstrating sensitivity to another's needs, and developing common ground (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). These previous works focus on offering participants therapeutic and confessional spaces through which to connect with researchers and as a result focus researcher's attention on relationships as separate distinct connections.

My findings extend our insight regarding ways to establish relational connection with participants by highlighting the need to consider the larger network of relationships comprising the research context. In this case, there was a relatively small community of participants and they were aware of each other. Nonetheless, when asked, one cannot confirm or deny whether you have interviewed another person or divulge what the other participant may have said in order to maintain confidentiality. However, a direct refusal to answer such a question might hinder building a constructive researcher-participant relationship. Engaged scholars may manage the challenge of creating relational connections in sensitive multi-organizational systems by shifting from thinking interpersonally, where the focus is on developing distinct connections with each individual participant, to thinking systemically, where the focus is on developing distinct individual connections while being mindful of managing those individual connections in relation to web of relationships associated with a particular research project.

Thinking systemically in research conversations refers to considering the multiple layers of conflict situations that shape the topic or problem being addressed through engaged work (Daniels & Walker, 1996; 2001). Engaged work across multiple organizations yields a web of organizational actors with which the researcher develops relationships. Thinking systemically means focusing on how the researcher shares

relationships with people in conflict, who do not trust each other, and how engaged scholars juggle those relationships simultaneously. The findings suggest that thinking systemically is a key challenge for researchers because they need to convey a neutral position yet also be open and response to participants' questions of their personal stance. Thinking systemically also poses challenges regarding employing language that resonates as common language among a system of diverse participants, especially ensuring that language is not loaded for any particular group within the system. For example, two of the strategies regarding relational connection, resonance checks and cocktail party framing, are language-centric best practices aimed at developing common understandings with and among participants.

The research access theme in the findings refers to gaining and sustaining access to organizations and communities for research purposes. The challenges associated with this theme include organizational access, interview confidentiality-disclosure, and confidentiality-disclosure. Research access challenges have been previously studied as pertaining to establishing key contacts and gaining permission from organizational gate-keepers into complex organizations (Barbour & Gill, 2014; Friedman & Orru, 1991). Other scholars have stressed the importance of leveraging participants' expertise and interests to maintain research processes responsive to their needs (Simpson & Seibold, 2008). My findings extend our insight into gaining research access for engaged scholarship by suggesting that engaged scholars need to specifically convey this value by connecting their research goals to project goals that the solicited organizations and organizational members find meaningful. Engaged scholars gain and sustain access into

hard-to-access settings by shifting from framing their project as pursuing knowledge, to framing their project as pursuing added practical value to participants and their organization.

Value was communicated to participants initially in order to gain access to participants. It also played a key role in how I managed challenges associated with confidentiality, as I wanted to ensure that not only did participants have something to gain from my research, but also that participating would not result in significant costs to their professional or personal work. In adopting a business vocabulary, my self-marketing strategy draws attention to the importance of adopting a self-presentation style that speaks the language of the engaged community. In this study, I was engaging in the professional world where terms like "project deliverable" and issues like value, and return-on-investment are salient (Suster, 2013). As an engaged scholar, I was seeking access into a multi-organizational system in which I would effectively constitute a one-woman entity. I was very aware of how I presented myself as not only a researcher but also a professional who could valuably collaborate with other professionals. The findings suggest that the use of branding skills taps into the need for engaged scholars to consider how they enter into these systems as an entity and what they offer the system while being there (Warzel, 2011).

This move requires translation from framing research in terms of its goal to generate knowledge to framing research in terms of the practical value it offers participants and organizations. This move does not suggest that engaged scholars downplay the theoretical aspect of engaged work, rather it works to develop connections

with audiences for whom theoretical work is not a high priority. The reality I faced was that asking for an hour of representatives' time to conduct an interview was a "big ask" and one not easily granted by participants unless they saw some value in it for them or their organization. As evidenced in the results, this translation is especially important in sensitive issues where organizational members' skepticism of participating may have been due to research introductions that did not clearly demonstrate how their participation would benefit them.

Viewing access as a value-added endeavor highlights the need for engaged scholars to connect to potential participants' interests and needs in their presentation (research introduction), product (their research and their own expertise), and deliverables (shared findings). Self-marketing enables scholars to initiate conversations with organizational members in the introductory phases of research by adopting a business vocabulary that resonates with practitioners in order to convey their neutrality on sensitive topics. This business vocabulary is a key move in promoting transparency by using language that resonates with practitioners. Viewing access as a value-added endeavor also highlights the importance of reducing costs to participants. Within sensitive research settings, the close relationships that engaged scholarship offers may appear to organizational members as posing the risk of interfering with their professional work or worse, their personal reputations. Adopting a value-added approach is important here as well because it moves engaged scholars to go above and beyond in demonstrating an alignment with their concerns with the cost of participation. My abundant caution with protecting confidentiality is an example of aligning with central

concerns of my participants so as to limit the potential costs of participation, and therefore increase the potential value to them.

Second, the analysis suggests that engaged scholarship needs to more closely consider the larger political and legal contexts surrounding engaged organizational research in sensitive settings. Previous engaged scholars have recognized the importance of organizational contexts as they influence how scholars and practitioners collaborate in conversation regarding research relevance (Boyer, 1996; Dempsey & Barge, 2014). Others have also noted that research contexts shape the relationships and research practices that emerge when academic and practitioner communities collaborate (Simpson & Seibold, 2008). My findings extend our insight into the realm of sensitive engaged organizational research by suggesting that engaged scholarship also needs to emphasize legal and political contexts. The legal and political contexts that surround engaged work in sensitive settings may constrain the co-production of knowledge by limiting the collaborative potential of scholars and non-academic practitioners.

The political context has been previously articulated as a challenge of gaining organizational access for sensitive research: researchers in sensitive settings need to contend with the bureaucracies that may constrain or enable their ability to collaborate with participants (Friedman & Orru, 1991). The politics surrounding sensitive research are amplified for engaged scholars. While the strategy of securing backing and support from individuals who hold political clout has been previously proposed for gaining access in sensitive research (Friedman & Orru, 1991), my strategies of capturing the essence, polite deflection, self-marketing, political astuteness, neutral validation, process

emphasis, and hypothetical questioning speak more directly to engaged scholars' challenge to cultivate collaborative relationships and facilitate co-produced useful knowledge amid potentially politically-sensitive research.

These strategies reflect various ways that engaged scholars can be engaged and reflexive: engaged in both studying communicative practices regarding sensitive issues and the co-production of knowledge that moves these issues forward, while also reflexively considering the potentially political consequences of their engagement with participants. For example, self-marketing and process emphasis strategies help engaged scholars have transparent conversations with participants regarding their motivations for and levels of intervention offered, in research. Sensitive issues regarding social conflicts with political implications highlight this need for transparency between researchers and participants. The capturing the essence strategy goes a step beyond participant confidentiality to minimize political backlash by being aware of subtle identification markers that may potentially lead to participant recognition within a small community of professionals. The hypothetical questioning strategy acknowledges the heightened political threats posed to participants in sensitive engaged scholarship, and seeks to reduce these threats while still generating useful knowledge. Strategies such as political astuteness and neutral validation provide ways of engaging in jointly meaningful conversations with participants whose needs and interests may conflict.

Researchers also need to contend with the legal contexts that often serve as the backdrop of sensitive issues and regulate research relationships and products (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). Engaged scholars have the amplified challenge of considering how

these legal implications impact their ability to develop collaborative relationships with participants that pursue Dempsey and Barge's (2014) "democratic conversation" ideal. While sensitive research may also pursue access into complex issues, the length of stay in these organizations is much shorter. Indeed conversations of access seem to refer to "getting in" (Friedman & Orru, 1991), not "staying." Engaged scholars seeking to "stay" in organizations need to be attuned to legal constraints affecting their collaborative potential with participants.

One major legal consideration is when research is undertaken concurrent to litigation, as was the case in my study. My strategies of neutral validation, process emphasis, capturing the essence, self-marketing and hypothetical questioning offer engaged scholars multiple ways to navigate collaborative relationships with participants while being respectful to organizations' legal interests. The self-marketing strategies enable participants to ascertain the researcher's interests, goals and problem definition before deciding to collaborate. By seeking to meet both researcher and participant needs, these strategies seek to overcome the challenges that legal contexts pose to Dempsey and Barge's (2014) principles of co-design and co-missioning in practice.

Another legal challenge involves conducting research in security sensitive settings, such as the case in the Navy-marine mammal issue involving a Department of Defense agency. Security sensitivities when such organizations are involved in research include classified information or government-restricted organizational access. Thus not only are participants subjected to legally-mandated organizational constraints, there might also be legal implications for the products of engaged work. In a previous study

involving a similarly security sensitive setting, Barbour and Gill (2014) conducted engaged research at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. They experienced heightened barriers to organizational access and were forced to consider the legal implications of their work, as a result of working in this setting. They recommend engaged scholars talk to lawyers and review board analysts regarding the legal implications of their work. This study identifies the practice of hypothetical questioning more useful during interviews, which engaged scholars can employ so that participants can share their communicative experiences in confidential conversations without violating confidentiality oaths to which they are legally bound.

In these practices, engaged scholars can collaborate with participants on the very challenges that may constrain their collaborative relationship. They emphasize organizational value, an understanding of surrounding context, and neutrality while de-emphasizing the differences that have often caused legal and political concerns in the first place. Thus, these practices contribute additional strategies for engaged scholars to limit some of the immediate concerns with this type of work. What these strategies have in common is that they all work with legal and political constraints in the moment.

Third, the analysis suggests that engaged scholars must manage emergent research design issues with situated judgment. A key lesson I learned from this process relates to the importance of staying present and in the moment. My experience managing these challenges supports the notion that researchers engage in "situated judgment" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The challenges I faced cropped up unexpectedly and there was rarely time to consult my advisor, review board analyst, or literature for advice. I

often was left to manage these challenges with split second decisions during the natural flow of my interviews with participants. Staying in the moment didn't just apply to the interview itself (Roulston, 2013), it came to define much of the engaged research process.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) point out that the professionalism conveyed by researchers during interviews stems from their use of situated judgments of the afterlife of their practical decisions. Professionalism refers to an enacted standard of practice on the job (Evans, 2008; Hoyle, 2001). Grey (1998) argues it has more to do with one's conduct than one's technical expertise or qualifications, since the latter is often assumed by others given one's position. In interviews, researchers are "professionals" who need to exercise sound judgment (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The findings of this study extend our understanding of situated judgment in qualitative research into engaged organizational research within sensitive settings.

The findings of this study suggest that a critical component to engaged research is exercising judgment throughout the process, or as the saying goes, "keeping on ones toes," for several reasons. First, the research we conduct as engaged scholars has an afterlife beyond academic conventions and publications. It has the potential to impact participants as well as relations within and across organizations. Participants may expect "out of touch" academics seeking an interview, never to be seen again once the interview is over. Instead, engaged scholars demonstrate their competence not only in regards to their subject matter expertise but also with the ability to consider and engage with the real world implications of their work. When engaging in sensitive engaged research, this

becomes even more important because of the high stakes, emotionally, physically and politically, potentially involved.

Second, engaged scholars need to engage organizations and communities as professionals, not only academics and thus need to be able to take a professionals' perspective when exercising judgment. Kvale and Brinkman recommend that "professional" interviewers study the method and topic that informs their interviews with participants. This process is not all method, it is also a craft developed with skill (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). While all researchers experience unforeseen challenges, engaged researchers in "democratic conversations" (Dempsey & Barge, 2014) with participants face additional challenges associated with balancing their participants' needs with their own. This involves thinking of the research process not only from an academic standpoint, but also a professional standpoint. For example, what types of competence are valued in professional contexts? How do engaged scholars convey themselves to (potential) participants as professionally competent collaborative partners?

In engaged work, this competence includes the ability to perform under the norms of non-academic organizations. For example, the revisions to my recruitment email reflect my attempts to conform to business email etiquette and demonstrate myself as someone who brought value to a collaborative relationship. We need to further the conversation regarding the kinds of skills that engaged scholars need to acquire to put them in the best position to conduct ethical and co-produced projects as professionals. I have developed greater skills in attunement, adaptation, and persistence and a greater

appreciation for the powerful potential yet humbling responsibility associated with engaged research.

Third, engaged scholars need to exercise situated judgment in order to make micro-scale decisions to keep the emergent research design responsive to both their and their participants' needs. Professionalism in engaged scholarship means being able to exercise sound judgment in recognizing and responding to complex and evolving situations as they arise in the co-production of knowledge. Engaged researchers act professionally in making situated judgments with the information they have at hand. The information I had at hand to help me in these situated judgments included my understanding of the issue combined with my professional insight into the culture and perspectives within military, science and animal welfare organizations. This information led me to take a cautious stance as a researcher in the sense that I was aware of the sensitivity surrounding this issue, especially given that the timing of my research coincided with legal proceedings. For example I took a very cautious stance on protecting confidentiality. Others in this situation might not have been as cautious, indeed some have argued in favor of denaturalizing the norm of participant confidentiality in socially situated research (Taylor & Land, 2014). The practices I engaged in during the research process reflect judgment calls I made when confronted with challenges; judgment calls shaped by my understanding of the issue's sensitivity and my commitment to pursuing collaborative relationships with participants.

The findings of this research suggest several avenues ripe for future research and practice. A potential avenue for future research would be to investigate the practitioner

perspective on the challenges and situated practices presented in this study. We know that practitioners' feedback on research findings enhance the quality of research because their reflections provide researchers with a sort of "fact check" that they haven't overlooked something important in the data and that the findings resonate with practitioner experiences (Meares, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs,& Ginossar, 2004). Simpson and Seibold (2008) argue that the value of theoretical insights depends on the degree to which they are relevant from the practitioner perspective. Extending these insights suggest that in order to more fully preserve the multiple voices in engaged scholarship (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Putnam & Dempsey, 2015), the value of the challenges and situated practices presented cannot be determined without exploring the practitioner perspective towards them. However, we don't know how practitioners perceived them. To investigate this, we need to further explore their experiences in the challenges encountered in difficult researcher-practitioner conversations.

A second potential direction for future practice would be to further investigate the concrete practices associated with managing democratic conversations with non-academic practitioners. From Dempsey and Barge's (2014) view of engaged scholarship as democratic conversation, we know that such an aim involves maintaining the democratic standard throughout the research process. They argue that it is not enough to design for democratizing the co-production of knowledge, but that rather this needs to be more acutely addressed in engaged scholars' reflexive practice. Extending their argument in combination with the findings of this study suggests the need for future research to identify the particular skills that engaged scholars need to develop in order to

sustain democratic conversations in practice. Such research would be particularly useful for developing graduate curriculum aimed at beginning engaged scholars (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008).

In conclusion, this study focused on difficult conversations between researchers and participants in engaged organizational research. It suggested various challenges and management strategies for responding to these difficulties. In doing so, this study contributed new insight into relational connection, research access and situated judgment as well as the importance of research contexts for managing interactional challenges encountered in the research process. These areas of contribution highlight future research possibilities for further exploring researcher-participant relationships in engaged organizational research. Despite the challenges of this type of research, will I continue developing my research agenda as an engaged scholar? Absolutely! Now I know the thrill of engaging with participants in collaborative research to make a difference on socially relevant issues, is the very same that can throw you curve balls.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this dissertation was to explore difficult conversations in environmental conflicts. I focused on the Navy-marine mammal issue as a case study of environmental conflict in which to examine how representatives interact in interorganizational conversations. The analyses of the three studies explore difficult conversations from three angles: (1) interactional challenges, (2) emotional dynamics, and (3) situational challenges in researcher-participant relationships. In this concluding chapter, I offer a brief description of the key findings from the three studies. Building on the three studies, I offer a preliminary model of difficult conversations and pose directions for future research.

Study 1: Managing Difficult Conversations in Environmental Conflict

The first study focused on the interactional challenges encountered in difficult conversations and what strategies may be employed to manage them. I used the Navy-marine mammal issue as a useful interorganizational conflict to examine interaction among representatives from conflicting organizational perspectives. Interviews were conducted with 29 individuals representing 6 key organizations involved in the issue. Interview data were analyzed for emergent themes using a two-part coding process.

The analysis suggested that representatives strongly associated their conversations with each other with matters of science. In fact, they found that easier conversations were enabled by exchanges of scientific information. Such exchanges were influenced by: (1) presence of scientifically-minded or interested individuals, (2)

common goals for learning from the conversation, and (3) common privileging of scientific information as the preferred type of knowledge to support positions. On the other hand, where conversations became more difficult is when they involved interpretation debates. These difficult debates were influenced by: (1) different groups' use of science, (2) representatives' conflicting organizational perspectives, (3) different understandings or interest in considering the policy implications of science interpretations, and (4) representatives' varying levels of concern for research funding sources.

The findings suggested that relationship-building among representatives can improve their ability to manage these difficult conversations constructively. The implications of these findings is that they suggest that representatives have emotional concerns that need to be addressed, that personalized rather that only professional relationships foster a climate for addressing these concerns, and that such relationships can foster more systemic awareness among representatives.

Study 2: Managing Emotional Moments in Environmental Conflict

The second study focused on the emotional dynamics encountered in difficult conversations and what strategies may be employed to manage them. Here again, the Navy-marine mammal issue served as a case study of an interorganizational conflict so as to examine how representatives manage strong emotions encountered in these conversation settings. The interview data were analyzed for emergent themes regarding representative's emotional experiences, using a two-phase process. First, these experiences were clustered into categories of emotional moments. Then the categories

were further differentiated by the felt emotions, emotion management strategies and implicit communication rules that characterized them.

The analysis suggested a typology of emotional moments consisting of: (1) violated expectations, (2) personal attacks, and (3) criticism encounters. Representatives experienced negative emotions in these moments, whose display they sought to manage though their common reference of professional norms. Representatives employed several different strategies in seeking to manage their display of emotions including emotional detachment, indirect expression and scolding. Across all types of emotional moments, representatives used emotional detachment to respond to strong emotions.

The findings suggested that professionalism was a key concept associated with emotion in difficult conversation settings because emotions participants perceived that emotions needed to be neutralized to minimize their negative impact. One implication of these findings is that they suggest that representatives were more influenced by professional norms than organizational norms for emotion display in interorganizational settings. Additionally, emotional moments were characterized by negative emotions, which mirror the scientific culture of debate that largely guides their discussions on the issue. A third implication is that more active management strategies may be employed in moments of face threat, in contrast to the baseline use of emotional detachment.

Study 3: Managing Difficult Conversations in Engaged Scholarship

The third study focused on difficult conversations in sensitive settings posed by researchers wanting to access interorganizational conflict situations, and what strategies may be employed to manage the challenges to participant relationships. Researcher-

participant conversations emerging from a research project on the Navy-marine mammal issue, were explored. The study drew on field note journal entries, email correspondence with participants, as well as the interview data from 29 individuals representing 6 key organizations involved in the issue. The journal and interview data were analyzed for emergent themes using a two-part coding process, and the email correspondence served to further support emergent themes.

The analysis suggested that researchers experience challenges in conversations with participants centering on issues of relational connection including: (1) maintaining neutrality, (2) construct resonance, and (3) facilitating disclosure. Strategies employed for managing these challenges included: (1) neutral validation, (2) process emphasis, (3) cocktail party framing, (4) clarifying "the ask," (5) hypothetical questioning, and (6) resonance checks. Researchers also experience issues regarding gaining and maintaining research access including: (1) organizational access, (2) interview confidentiality-disclosure, and (3) analysis confidentiality-disclosure. Strategies for managing these challenges include: (1) self-marketing, (2) polite deflection, (3) political astuteness, and (4) capturing the essence.

The findings suggested that researchers need to consider the larger political and legal contexts that shape, and likely constrain, the conflict situations their research addresses. Another implication of the findings is that they highlight the importance for researchers exercising situated judgment in order to respond to these challenges as the research process unfolds.

A Preliminary Model of Difficult Conversations

The findings across my three dissertation studies generated a set of key learnings regarding managing difficult conversations within environmental conflicts. From these learnings, I identified several overarching themes regarding difficult conversations and how to manage them. These themes included: (1) contextual influence, (2) systemic connection, and (3) relational climate. Taken together, these themes are the basis for creating a preliminary model of difficult conversations that differentiates between *stuck conversations* and *expansive conversations*.

Overarching Themes

I identified three cross-cutting themes that represent key factors shaping interaction in difficult conversations emerging from the three studies comprising my dissertation. These factors pertain to the complexities of difficult conversations as well as possibilities for their management: (1) contextual influence, (2) systemic connection, and (3) relational climate.

Contextual influence. Difficult conversations are influenced by the contexts in which they take place. The three studies suggest several types of contexts that influence difficult conversations: (1) organizational, (2) political, (3) legal, and (4) relational. Study 1 highlighted how the *organizational context* of conversations highlights issues of organizational goals, missions, resources and values. Relatively substantive issues included how organizations' missions align. On the other hand, emotionally-laden issues referred to matters such the interpretation of social responsibility within organizations' missions. Representatives may confront conflict when their organizationally-driven

values and goals are incommensurate. They face difficulty in conversations on issues that force them to grapple with conflicting organizational perspectives.

Studies 1 and 3 indicated how legal and political contexts influenced conversations. *Legal context* influenced whether one was allowed to participate in conversations in the first place, approved topics of discussion, and provided the ability to share information, the latitude to pursue agreements, and the jurisdiction and accountability for decisions. While conversations regarding topics like what laws pertaining to Navy training activities were relatively straightforward, those that touched on distrust stemming from past litigation were highly emotionally-charged. Representatives operating from competing legal perspectives in conversations faced great difficulty as a result, especially during ongoing litigation when sides were crafted in order to prevail in disputes.

Political context surrounding complex issues also influenced conversations in terms of the policy trade-offs, political alliances, and interests in decision outcomes. Substantive policy issues influencing conversations included what policy parameters decision-makers were operating within. Relatively more emotionally-loaded was the issue of different perspectives on the animal welfare protections that should be incorporated in those policy decisions. Representatives engaged in difficult conversations when they felt they stood to gain or lose by resulting decisions and policies associated with the issue.

Each of the studies touched on the way that professional norms influenced the *relational context* and shaped conversations by providing a code of conduct for how

actors should relate to one another. Professional norms were a particularly important context because professionalism was considered a universal set of norms across occupations that can help manage the complex issues arising from diverse organizational, legal and political interests include actors representing a diverse set of occupations and organizations (Lively, 2000). For example, in Study 2, professionalism was put forward as a universal standard for conduct influencing how representatives should conduct themselves in conversations regarding the display of emotions. Representatives commonly referenced professionalism as guiding how they expressed their emotions in emotional moments during difficult conversations. A key finding was that across organizational affiliation, emotional moments were characterized by negative emotions and that emotional detachment was used as a common strategy for maintaining a neutral and professional demeanor in difficult conversations.

Systemic connections. Difficult conversations are influenced by the degree to which actors have systemically aware of their connections with each other, their connections with other individuals and groups affiliated with the conflict, the substantive issues at play, and the relational and emotional dimensions of the conflict. This theme refers to awareness among actors in difficult conversations as to their interconnectedness and the constellation of relationships that bind them together. Awareness of systemic connections encourages actors to expand their gaze on conversations upwardly and horizontally. First, actors need to gaze upward to develop their views on higher-order systems in order to develop an understanding of the external factors that enable and constrain difficult conversations in the moment (Daniels & Walker, 1996; 2001). As

Studies 1, 2, and 3 suggest, there are broader organizational, political, legal, and relational contexts in which actions, norms, and structures are generated on how conversations play out among actors in the moment.

Developing systemic awareness by gazing upward accomplishes two important purposes. First, it enables actors to understand the degree to which difficulty in conversation is a product of external forces. This is important so that actors can develop realistic understandings of their conflict rather than developing inflated perspectives of differences. Realistic understandings of conflict help them identify potential areas for flexibility that are under their control. This awareness may serve to empower them to find ways to work around imposed organizational structures in order to minimize interpersonal conflict (Nicotera & Mahon, 2013). Second, it develops actors' awareness of the emotionality at the core of difficult conversations (Stone et al., 2010). The negative emotionality of difficult conversations proposed in Study 2 reflected the privileging of rationality in such "public scientific controversies" (Crick & Gabriel, 2010) as the Navy-marine mammal issue. What that leads to is an emphasis on the substantive issues regarding organizational, legal, political and professional interests, but it ignores the deeply personal and subjective issues which involve value and interests that must be addressed in order meaningfully manage difficult conversations (Stone et al., 2010). Systemic awareness of connections among actors might provide them with new ways with which to see the drivers behind their differences, as well as draw connections from those differences back to their organizational, legal and political origins.

Fostering an awareness of systemic connections also encourages actors to expand their gaze horizontally, in order develop an understanding of the multiple simultaneously-occurring relationships yielded by the web of actors involved on a particular issue. The constellation of conversations emerging from interaction across organizations involved in complex issues like the Navy-marine mammal issue, generate numerous interpersonal, group and interorganizational relationships. Each actor is part of a network of interpersonal relationships that occur simultaneously with many others. To some degree, their conversations in this relationship are unique and distinct from those around them. But to a larger degree, these conversations are very much connected to each other, which means that connections in one relationship likely impact the connections developed in another. This may be experienced as a complicating factor for conversations if actors feel constrained in their inability to have meaningful conversations with others due to social network ties.

When actors develop awareness of the multiplicity of relationships that are present, they are better able to expand their view of the system in which they exist. This expanded view enables them to develop an understanding of how actors in the system are arranged and the constraints of the arrangement. Study 3 drew attention to the importance of the concept of horizontal systemic awareness. For example, it highlighted how actors seeking to maintain neutrality on issues may be challenged by their multiple potentially conflicting relationships. Those they interact with may question the actor's ability to preserve confidentiality across these conflicting relationships. As another example, it proposed that actors in difficult conversations are able to respond

dynamically by exercising situated judgment. In the context of systemic connections, situated judgment assists actors in staying nimble to juggle the multiplicity of relationships they face, responsive to unfolding events as well as being able to make in the moment decisions regarding how to manage the complexities associated with the web of intermingled relationships.

Relational climate. Difficult conversations are influenced by the type of relational climate that exists among actors. Studies 1 and 3 highlighted the difference between professional and personal climates. In *professional climates*, actors know each other primarily as professionals and focus their conversation on substantive and impersonal issues. *Personal climates* are characterized by actors getting to know each other on an individual level, and who develop I-Thou relationships (Buber, 1957).

Studies 1 and 3 suggested the impact that different types of climates had on discussion topics as well as actors' conduct. Regarding discussion topics, across the two studies, professional climates were viewed as an important setting for working relationships focusing on issues relating to professional or occupational identities, rather than individual identities. Professional climates supported difficult conversations whose topics centered around substantive issues or matters regarding organizational interests, because actors did not relate to each other on a more intimate level. Their avoidance of emotionality in difficult conversations was also seen in the way that their conduct neutralized emotional display. Referencing standards of professionalism, actors sought to neutralize the display of emotion in difficult conversations because they perceived expressing emotional conduct as largely unprofessional. In an effort to maintain a neutral

demeanor in emotionally-charged conversations, they detached emotionally because this strategy was seen to preserve the professional climate.

On the other hand, Study 1 suggested that more personal climates in conversations among actors served to humanize issues otherwise plagued by difficult conversations. In personal climates, actors related to each not just as professionals but also as human beings. This meant that they developed a sense of who each other was as a person rather than just according to professional identities. Getting to know each other was documented in Study 1 as enabling actors to shift from positioning themselves as competitors relative to each other, to positioning themselves as collaborators. In developing personal connections with others in personalized conversations, actors were more likely to develop a level of trust build up, which in turn encouraged them to explore new ways of working together on contentious topics. For example, Study 1 suggested that actors engaged in more personalized conversations were more receptive to learning from each other and exploring new understanding of contentious issues.

Studies 1 and 3 suggest that shifting from professional to personal climates is possible when actors learn about the practical value that each contributes to conversations. Actors who discover the value that each can contribute towards the others' interest, may be more inclined to see each other as potential collaborators, and this collaborative spirit in conversations encourages them to get to know each other more personally. Study 1 suggested that this may occur because organizational representatives recognize that the complexities often rest with the issues themselves, and that working together is required in order to be able to move forward on the issue. Study 3 suggested

that value may be conveyed to other actors by connecting one's goals to their needs and interests as well as framing this value with a vocabulary that resonates with their perspective on the issues.

A Model for Managing Difficult Conversations

These three themes provide the basis for proposing a model for managing difficult conversations in conflicts (see Figure 1). The model differentiates between *stuck conversations* and their constructive counterparts, *expansive conversations*. The idea of expansive conversations captures what was documented in the three studies, which is that challenging conversations were not necessarily negative experiences. Some of these conversations, such as the lively debates regarding the state of the science among representatives, or the conversations with participants regarding their concerns of the use of loaded research terms, were seen as positive and invigorating conversations yielding great value.

The model begins by assuming that all difficult conversations occur within context. Common to both constructive and destructive difficult conversations, organizational, legal, relational, and political contexts serve to influence the nature of topics and how they are addressed in difficult conversations. These contexts not only shape potential conversation topics that are both substantive (issue-focused) and emotional (social and relationally-focused), they also influence actors' conduct in difficult conversations. Difficult conversations may become either stuck or expansive conversations. These two types of conversations are distinguished by: (1) how

substantive and emotional concerns are managed, and (2) the type of relational climate that exists among actors.

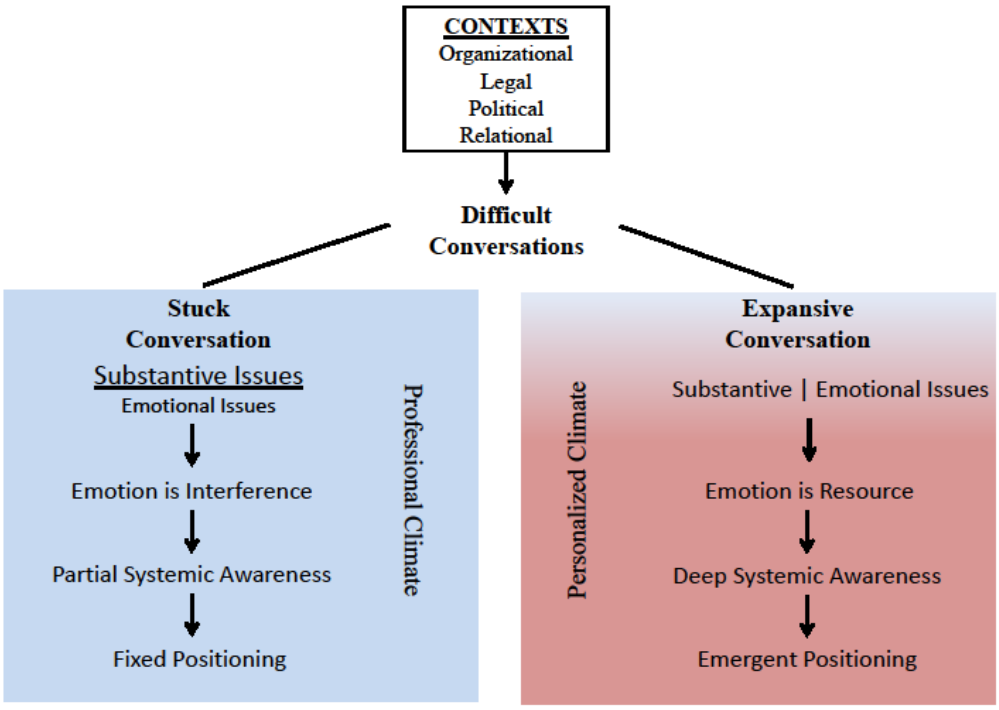

Figure 1. A Proposed Model of Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are relatively destructive when: (1) emotional concerns are silenced or delegitimized in favor of an emphasis on substantive issues, and (2) the relational climate is strictly professional. These two conditions promote the continuation of fixed positioning among actors in conversation, which sustains conflict. These destructive difficult conversations are called *stuck conversations*.

Difficult conversations are relatively constructive when: (1) emotional concerns are balanced with substantive issues, and (2) the relational climate becomes more personalized due to a more humanizing familiarity among actors. These two conditions

enable new positioning among actors in an effort to manage their conflict. These constructive forms are called *expansive conversations* as offering expanded conversation possibilities by achieving by generate new patterns of meaning making and setting free the old ways of positioning among actors.

Stuck conversations. Difficult conversations are initially marked by lack of attention paid to the emotional concerns regarding a complex issue, as well as I-It relationships among actors in which they view each other as tools for manipulation towards achieving objective ends on the issue (Buber, 1957). Both conditions serve to delegitimize the emotionality that is at the core of difficult conversations because they promote a rational orientation to conversations among organized actors (Putnam & Mumby, 1992). Emotionality stems from the issue itself, such as concerns for animal welfare in training activities, and relations among the actors, such as concerns relating to litigation. However, rationally-oriented conversations seek to address the substantive aspects of the issue. Emotionality may be neutralized through one's conduct or by limiting the topics of discussions to more technical subjects.

Emotion is seen to interfere with the pursuit of "rational" discussions. This serves to paint the emotional dimension of difficult conversations as interference. It fosters the continuation of conflict by delegitimizing the emotionality of complex issues through which a key opportunity for unfreezing fixed positioning among actors is ignored. Unfreezing fixed positioning holds promise to managing conflict among groups (Langenhove & Harre, 1999; Tan & Moghaddam, 1999). Attempts to keep conversations confined to technical issues may actually backfire by furthering emotionally-charged

conversations. By avoiding or obscuring the emotionality of high stakes associated with difficult conversations, people do not capture the totality of what is causing their difficulty in the first place.

By not addressing the emotional concerns on a contentious issue, actors develop only partial awareness for the system in which the issue and their relations to each other exist. They debate their issues with objective data yet organizational, legal, and political stakes are embedded with highly emotionally-charged concerns that debates of technical or scientific information do not resolve. They seek controlled neutral conduct yet some issues cause actors to feel passionately. These difficult conversations develop in actors an understanding of the obvious issues at the surface that divide them. However, they do not touch upon those deeper more underlying values that generate many of their difficulties interacting in the first place. The continued avoidance of more emotional topics promises to keep people locked in repeating conversations that lack progress.

As a result, difficult conversations promote fixed positioning among actors. Actors take up particular positions in relation to each other which link to longer-running conversation storylines (Langenhove & Harre, 1999). For example, relationships among groups could be guided by longer-running storylines pertaining to how members of the groups view their connection to each other. If they see themselves connected by competitive positions over a series of difficult conversations that keep them locked in as adversaries, the storyline that is generated from their connection is that they are adversaries and they will subsequently draw on these storylines as long as that view of their connection persists (Tan & Moghaddam, 1999). Difficult conversations

characterized by this fixed positioning among groups present little value to actors seeking meaningful exchanges and progress on the issues that divide them.

Expansive conversations. Expansive conversations are initially marked by balanced attention paid to the emotion concerns regarding a complex issue, as well as a personalized conversation climate that humanize conflicts situations (Buber, 1957). My view of expansive conversations includes the learning component of the learning conversations proposed by Stone et al. in *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. However, it differs from their model of difficult conversation management in one key way. Stone et al. (2010) focus on information sharing as the key shift from difficult conversations to learning conversations. However my dissertation suggests that their view is limited in that it does not address the centrality of relationship-building to actors' capacity or receptivity to adopting a learning stance in conversations. To adopt a learning stance, more is needed than the short-term focus on exchanging information in conversations. A key ingredient in the constructive shifting of difficult conversations is developing more open relationships, which are promoted through personalized interaction.

The weight of conversational climates, which enable actors to identify as both professionals and engage personally with each other, stems from the importance of positioning to difficult conversations previously discussed. Actors need to get to know each other in order to be able to take the first tentative steps towards repositioning themselves in a complex and controversial situation. The difficulty for actors to take this risk cannot be understated. High stakes – legally, organizationally, politically, and

professionally – are associated with adopting a learning stance. Such a move requires more time in which actors expand their views on the issue and each other and experiment with new ways of relating.

The model presumes that actors give balanced attention to emotional issues in expansive conversations. Emotion serves as a resource in these conversations. This is because by addressing the emotionality of difficult conversations, actors learn from each other through exchanging more information that may potentially reveal possible common ground among them. As actors in challenging situations get to know each other in personalized conversations, they learn about the emotionally-charged interests that underlie substantive issues. Learning about each other's emotional concerns is a valuable resource because it enables people to understand each other's motivations and needs. Their new learning on these issues is important because it can move actors to expand their view of the challenges they face with others. Actors are able to address the emotionally-laden issues that have gone unaddressed. As a result, they develop deeper awareness of the system of actors, interests and needs involved with the issue. Their understanding of the issues that divide them is expanded. Addressing a more detailed and nuanced set of topics in discussions serves to more fully engage them with the issues at the core of their conflict (Stone et al., 2010).

Expansive conversations manage the challenges posed by difficult conversations with an emphasis on emergent positioning among people facilitated by building more personal relationships in humanizing climates. As actors get to know each other and feel more personally connected, they may develop new views on each other which enable

them to consider new ways of positioning as conversations unfold. As they expand their repertoire of positions adopted in conversations, they are able to see their substantive and relational issues from different vantage points. This repositioning provides them with alternative views of conflict, which leads them to develop alternative storylines of what is happening in difficult conversations. With deeper awareness of issues, explored among actors with more personal connections, also come expanded possibilities for positive outcomes in difficult conversations.

Intervention points. This model suggests at least two key intervention points for transforming stuck conversations into expansive conversations. The first intervention point is where conversation climates are transformed from professional to personal. Personal climates are one of the key determinants of expansive conversations. They have the ability to generate a more open environment which fosters openness in actors. As the model suggests, as actors become more open with each other, they become more open-minded and curious regarding the issue too. This shift in conversation climates provides the space for actors to explore such an expanded view. Another key intervention point in this model is when conversation topics shift from strongly emphasizing substantive issues, to a balanced emphasis on emotional issues as well. Such a shift serves to provide not only space to have conversations about these issues, but also by providing this space, lends legitimacy to the need for actors to explore these issues. The issue becomes how to develop interventions where the introduction of relation and emotional issues becomes perceived as legitimate and relevant.

Future Research

The proposed model suggests several avenues for future research and practice. One potential vein of research centers on the concept of connection, and proposes investigation regarding how actors develop relationships that balance professional and personalized dimensions. The proposed model suggests that more personalized relations generate better management of difficult conversations. However, maintaining professional conduct is still a key concern for actors in professional settings (Evans, 2008; Grey, 1998). Professionalism is considered a standard of service, and as Study 2 showed, professional norms exert great influence across a variety of occupations. What this means is that in order for actors to be able to realistically engage in expansive conversations, they need to be able to balance both professional and more personal relationship requirements. Therefore, future research should examine how such blended relationships can be initially fostered, developed and maintained.

A second potential vein of research centers on the concept of judgment, and suggests that one area for future exploration is in how actors respond to unfolding conversations given larger contextual factors. Being able to respond with micro-scale decisions is important in unfolding conversations, because it is these decisions that actors' make that position and reposition themselves in relation to others (Langenhove & Harre, 1999). The model suggests that difficult conversations are influenced by contextual factors and it may be reasonably assumed that at times, these factors may restrict actors' ability, or even desire, to take new perspectives in conversation. What this means is that actors may need to adapt their conversational practices, or partially

resist particular contextual pressures, in order to stay in the moment and responsive in expansive conversations. Future research is needed to explore to what degree actors able to transform, resist or adapt to contextual pressures and furthermore, the practices or strategies they use to do so.

Summary

This dissertation investigated difficult conversations in environmental conflicts and explored how difficult conversations are constructed, their emotional dynamics, and how research conversations with participants may also be viewed as a type of difficult conversation. In doing so, this dissertation generated key insights regarding the importance of contextual influence, systemic connection, and relational climate for understanding the nature of difficult conversations and possible avenues towards improving their management. Taken together, the key learnings of this dissertation suggest that expansive conversations, fueled by a more personalized conversation climate and balanced attention to actors' emotional concerns, may be able to write more constructive storylines among people with diverse perspectives in complex issues.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

1. What is your position in your organization? In your current position, what are your responsibilities and duties?

2. What is your organization's stake in the issue? What's your interest in the issue?

3. When you talk to members of other key organizations involved with the issue, who do you talk to?
    a. What do you talk about?
    b. In what setting(s) do you have these conversations?

4. Of all the conversations you are having on this issue, which are more difficult to have?
    a. What would be a specific example?
    b. Who was present?
    c. What did you say in these conversations?
    d. How did others respond?
    e. What influences the way you engaged with people in this conversation?
        i. Background? Training?
    f. How did you feel in these conversations?
    g. How did you manage these feelings?
    h. Did you think you managed those feelings well? Why or why not?

5. Which of these conversations are easy to have?
    a. What would be a specific example?
    b. Who was present?
    c. What did you say in these conversations?
    d. How did others respond?
    e. What influences way you engaged with people in this conversation?
        i. Background? Training?
    f. How did you feel in these conversations?
    g. How did you manage these feelings?
    h. Did you think you managed those feelings well? Why or why not?

6. Where do public meetings fit into the kinds of conversations that you've mapped out?
    a. What do you see as the role of these meetings?
    b. What kinds of conversations take place in these meetings?
        a. What determines this?
    c. What topics are addressed at public meetings?
        a. What determines this?
    d. Who is usually involved in public meetings?

a. Why do you think that is?

8. As a wrap up question, is there anything additional that you would like to add that we didn't discuss today?